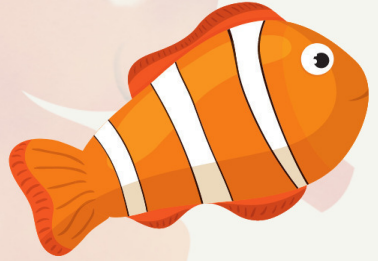




Jerry Hotter

AND



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Adventures

AT

FISHMARTS

SAMHITA JOSHI





SAMHITA JOSHI

Jerry Hotter and the Adventures at  
Fishmarts

*Something's always fishy at Fishmarts.*

*First published by Samhita Joshi 2021*

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*First edition*

*To all the Fishes in the Water and all the Birds in the Sky.*



Yer a lizard, Jerry.

RIGOROUS HAFBRID





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I

## Good Old Days

*No one attempts to cuddle me up!*



## The Living Relatives

**O**ur story begins when the boy wakes one fine morning only to find out that the future has something for him in store. Future has something for everyone in its store.

“Wake up Jerry. It’s 9 already,” Aunt Kinsi, a young, dark-brown haired, perfectly healthy woman in her thirties, half-yelled, half-screamed with excitement.

“I am...” Jerry mumbled, not yet fully awake. Today was Sunday, a not-exactly-favourable day for him because every Sunday—whenever he was with them—along with Purselys, who did it every day, he had to undergo the P90X exercise routine. It wasn’t great. It didn’t feel good. It was one of the three things Jerry hated the most about the Purselys:

1. **Their diet plans.** Honestly speaking, the amount of food they offered Jerry in one serving was enough to feed him for the whole day. He often (**regularly** would be a better word) told them that the food they served him was beyond his eating capacity, but every time, EVERY SINGLE TIME, the Purselys seem to have forgotten this fact. Since his parents had instructed him to not waste food when they left him with the Purselys (because they didn’t want to meet certain people), he had been following the same. He would sometimes wonder why the Purselys were still in shape, even after eating this much. Then the answer, one day, came straight to his

face: the P90X routine. *That's why.*

2. **Their P90X exercise.** He hated it only when he had to do it. Otherwise, he was fine seeing them do it. It was actually fun watching others do it unless, of course, you had to do it yourself.
3. **Their child Cuddly.** He (sometimes) hated him more than anything in the world, even more than their P90X routine.

Cuddly was Mr. and Mrs. Pursely's only child, just like Jerry was of Mr. and Mrs. Hotter. Cuddly was as if to define his name, extremely cuddly. He had an extremely annoying (according to Jerry) habit of cuddling everyone he knew, in their every meeting, as a gesture that he loved them. In the case of Jerry, who happened to be his only brother, he would go to extremes.

*Transformer Alert: For those not familiar with the concept of Cuddly as they call him, they must have remembered the word "muddly" for the name that had been coined by the early 20th century. Jerry's name is derived from the same Greek word for "v"—the name of an old cow, and that is, cows.*

If anything Jerry hated the most in the world—it was being cuddled, and Cuddly would cuddle him every single day when he was with them. Living with Purselys wasn't making things any better because his younger brother, himself, was the reason for any cuddling that was being (or would be) done to him. If it were any stranger, he would have immediately beaten the pulp out of them, previously having done that. Twice (for different reasons both times). But he couldn't do the same to Cuddly—he was his younger brother, after all.

Despite the difference, he loved his brother more than anyone else in the world (except for his parents! It would be wrong and unjust to love his brother more than his parents, and therefore, he loved him as much he loved his parents) and if someone planned to bring any harm to him, he would beat the pulp out of them (the only thing he was capable of doing in such situations), as he had done last year to a man who kept



bothering Cuddly to buy his soft candy, and once to a girl who had to hug him because of the play they were enacting at their school's annual function when Jerry was in grade 1 because he hated being cuddled. (For different reasons! I told ya.)

This year, Jerry was 10, and therefore, Cuddly—one year younger than him—9. Both shared their birthdays (but weren't twins; obviously) (this one had happened the last Sunday) because of being born on the same date. The only child of Thames and Liliun Hotter, Jerry was brought up with great care—been taught the “10 ultimate ways to deal any problem rationally”, so much so that he was even refrained from reading or listening to fairy tales.

“Where fairies exist, problems can't. Therefore, as is the case with our world, which is full of problems, we can safely say that FAIRIES DON'T EXIST. THAT'S IT,” he had heard his father argue on several occasions (to anyone who mentioned fairies in their conversation). The only reason: to make sure Jerry wasn't following anything irrational. Hence, it was natural for him to grow up to hate anything irrational or illogical.

*Transformer Alert: The Purselys' residence, just like any other house in the town, had a bit of a personality to it. It gave a really good, clean, and friendly vibe to any passerby. It was the cleanest home in town, making it stand out from the lot. It was just a nice, quiet place that didn't have a lot of trash and no kids. Bigger than the Hotters residence, it was the home of a pretty good boy—Cuddly. It's walls were painted in a nice black, bright, colorful shade, that made it look like a very old house. But it was renovated every five years.*

Jerry didn't mind living with the Purselys (except for the three reasons stated earlier)—they were his relatives after all—Aunt Kinsi and Mrs. Hotter were sisters, Aunt Kinsi being the elder one. One interesting fact about Aunt Kinsi was that she was barely known by her actual name Atkinsiana because whoever found her name too long to pronounce (everyone except her sister Liliun, whose name was also shortened

to Lily—for the same reason) called her Kinsi, including her parents, who had decided to name their children that way—*both* after names of popular flowers.

Thankfully, the exercise hour was over by now, and when it finally was the time for their breakfast, the doorbell rang. TRING.

## The Unwanted Visitor

Except for once or twice a month, when it came earlier, the milk used to be delivered at the Purselys' residence at about 10 in the morning. Today, being that once or twice, it was delivered even before Jerry had woke up.

"But the milk has arrived already!" hailed Uncle Venom who was busy reading the weekly G.K. magazine that came as a bonus when you paid for the yearly newspaper subscription. IN ADVANCE. Jerry's uncle, Venom Pursely, just as healthy as his significant other, was the head and CEO of a reputed unnamed organisation that dealt with stocks. The character had been here only for an introduction. He won't appear again in the story because being a CEO of a reputed, established firm makes it difficult to manage a work-life balance. And this was precisely the case with Uncle Venom. Also, since he doesn't add value to the story, feel safe and free to neglect his existence. The firm is unnamed too, for the same reason.

Their entrance door, upon opening, led to the lobby, the room which, at present, housed 75% of the current house population. Cuddly was the one to open the door because Aunt Kinsi was preparing the breakfast, and Jerry, being himself, was busy catching breath from the "heavy-duty" exercise he had just finished. Cuddly was subjected to this exercise every day; Jerry, once a week.

An unknown figure stood at the door. Jerry could tell the figure was

of someone unfamiliar because Cuddly didn't hug it, or whoever he/she was, upon its, or his/her, arrival. The unfamiliar guest was an enormous, genetically impossible, fat man, wearing huge clothes that made him look even fatter, who asked for a glass of water upon entering the house.

*What he actually needs is the P90X routine*, Jerry thought as Cuddly ran, screaming, scared of this man, and clung to Uncle Venom. Hearing Cuddly run, Aunt Kinsi stepped outside of the kitchen to have a look at their visitor.

*Transformer Alert: The man wore shabby black clothes that reminded Jerry of a Vampire that he had once accidentally seen. Accidentally because "Vampires, Fairies and Magicians were, all, FAKE as Shrek (his favourite character!)"*. The man didn't give positive vibes, which led him to believe that the vampire had no sense of humor and had no reason to believe he was going to get his money back. The man wasn't afraid to be funny and he was quite angry about the poor life he had been living since his past.

"Der' u'r Jerry," the fat-man said, handing Jerry something that looked like an envelope.

Jerry looked both confused and scared. *How did this completely unknown man know his name?* Only his familiars did. He stood up from his chair and prepared to leave the room.

"Fea' not Jerry. 'old me u won't be comin' oderwise. Da's y dey sent me." The fat-man spoke again.

A period of silence sustained during which no words were exchanged.

"Has Lily told you about Fishmarts?" Aunt Kinsi finally spoke, addressing Jerry.

*Transformer Alert: Aunt Kinsi, about as young as Jerry's mother, though five years elder, was a big-time role model for her fans, especially younger kids. As a woman in her thirties, she had often been involved in movies and music as a teenager, when a man was caught with a cigarette and shot to death in a Hollywood movie.*

*Aunt Kinsi must be knowing this man.* A thousand questions crossed

Jerry's mind. *Thousand* is just an exaggeration! A few questions crossed Jerry's mind.

"Not the least. I don't think I have heard about anything like that. Who's—who is he?" Jerry asked, pointing at the man, looking scared, nervousness evident in his voice.

Instead of his Aunt's, came the fat-man's baritone voice: "Yer a lizard, Jerry."

Jerry looked at Aunt Kinsi, confused, and then at Uncle Venom, who again became busy reading the newspaper thinking *I'm out of this nonsense*.

"Yer a lizard, Jerry. Told ya 'bout that."

"Whaat?" asked Jerry. This man was nuts.

"Yer a lizard, Jerry. Yer, a lizard Jerry. Yer, a lizard Jerry." The fat-man almost sang the lines as if reciting a song.

"SHUT UP. NO ONE ASKED YOU TO SING." Aunt Kinsi was clearly furious at the man. At his mother's yelling, Cuddly began to cry, and Uncle Venom had to rush him upstairs. Now instead of nervousness, anger was evident in Jerry's eyes—the man before him was the reason for his brother's tears.

"How do you know me?" Jerry finally asked, still not have gotten an answer to his previously asked question.

"Knew ya from the scar," the fat-man said, pointing to Jerry's forehead where a scar, in the shape of an oval, was present. An oval is the shape of an egg when viewed from a distance. However, his classmates never teased him about it (anymore) because the one time one of them had tried doing so—the next day, he was getting his 'Letter of Expulsion' from the school principal during the morning assembly.

Fishmarts. This wasn't something that they actively discussed at the Hotters. Jerry had a very vague gut feeling that Fishmarts was somehow the reason because of which his parents had left him with Cuddly. It was recently that he had heard about it. There was something about

that place that made his parents not talk about it. The question was: What?

"And I am a lizard? That's what you are saying," Jerry replied. "But clearly, I am a human."

"Dunno know. Tol' me that ye were a lizard and dat is all am sayin'. Dat's all."

Aunt Kinsi knew that this was the day they had to bid Jerry goodbye. One couldn't just refuse an invitation, more precisely an order, from Fishmarts. Though she had never been to Fishmarts, Lilium, Jerry's mother and her sister, who had 'been there, done that' for EIGHT-WHOLE-YEARS, had told her that accidents happened to folks who refused to send their wards to Fishmarts despite having received the letter—an invitation.

"The messengers (from Fishmarts) bring ill-luck with them. Those who refuse..." Those were Lilium's exact words before she had burst into tears, telling her sister about her stay at Fishmarts. Atkinsiana needn't be told anymore: *If you deny going with the messenger, they curse you. The messengers are cursed.* When they first received a letter addressed to Lilium, back at time when they were little kids (good ol' times!), they didn't know anything about the place. Still an invitation had come, despite Lilium (or anyone else in the family) not having applied for admission. Yet, their parents, being illogical evidently, thought it was a great idea to send her there. Fishmarts didn't have any tuition or school fees. *Maybe that was the reason why*, Kinsi now thought.

Jerry's father's, Thames's parents were already Lizards, so it was long-planned before (even before HIS parents were born!) that he would be going to Fishmarts BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY SCHOOL for Lizards on Earth. Or for that matter, in the entirety of existence.

A week before they arrived at the Purselys, Jerry had heard his father blabber (the Hotters had a limited number of guests, and Jerry was barely permitted to meet them, except when they were Purselys), "I

*haven't seen anything of practical importance being taught at Fishmarts. They would teach you what they called "magic", whereas, in fact, THEY ARE A HUNDRED DIFFERENT WAYS OF CATCHING FISH. Which nobody ever needs. I HAVE NEVER NEEDED IT. NEITHER HAS LILY. I DON'T GET HOW THEY DON'T FIND IT A WASTE OF ENERGY AND TIME."* When Thames was done, Mrs. Hotter began, "*AND FISHES TOO. Poor fishes. THEY DESERVE A LIFE. DON'T THEY?"*

Jerry was thankful at having overheard the conversation. It proved valuable to get to know what on Earth Fishmarts was, and why, having completed their education (finally!) at Fishmarts, his parents had left that place for better and vowed to never go back.

When Lilium and Thames got married, they decided if they ever had a kid, he or she wouldn't be receiving his elementary education at Fishmarts as they had. Despite having studied there for EIGHT-WHOLE-YEARS, they didn't want their child to be selected to attend Fishmarts. They did their best to save Jerry from any Fishmartian (a code word they invented to describe people who lived there) they encountered.

Their worries grew exponentially as Jerry tended 10. Having tried everything, when they got to know about the yet-to-come-invitation from their "trusted sources", thinking of their child's best, but most importantly, not wanting to be confronted by any Fishmartian, they dropped Jerry at the Purselys.

Aunt Kinsi's eyes filled with tears upon realising that Jerry would now be gone for EIGHT-WHOLE-YEARS. Seeing her cry, Jerry wanted to cry too, but realising that it won't do any good, he didn't. The invitation HAD come. Nothing else could be done about it now. That was the only choice left. A realisation came to him—*perhaps this was the day his parents were preparing him for*. All these years of being taught the logical way to approach different problems, HAD to pay off. All the hard work HAD to pay off.

"Worry not Aunt Kinsi. I am a man of rationality and logic," Jerry attempted to make her laugh.

Aunt Kinsi laughed, "Man!? No muscles? No bones?"

They both laughed. The only one who didn't laugh was the fat-man, who seemed not to have gotten the joke. And Venom, whose existence is being safely neglected. And Cuddly, who was not in the room—busy having daymares.

*Classic Fishmartian*, Jerry thought.

Now since the time for departure had come, Aunt Kinsi hugged and wished him luck. Uncle Venom, who was now in sight after having made Cuddly sleep, wished him too.

The fat-man who now prepared to leave with Jerry, again reminded her of the water he hadn't been given yet. After finally being offered water, he drank it all up and left. With Jerry, of course.



## The Dear Departed

“Who are you?” Jerry asked this fat-man again, not having received an answer the last time he had asked him the same. Or the time before it.

“Yer a lizard, Jerry.”

*If only people were always this crazy at Fishmarts...* Jerry’s head was throbbing with pain the more he thought about it.

“Where are we going?” Jerry asked, trying hard to match his strides with the large ones of the fat-man.

*Transformer Alert: Having received his mother’s eyes and father’s personality, Jerry was a very gentle, caring and very compassionate person, and he felt very proud of the fact that he was his parents’ son, who were the greatest and most loving people he had met.*

“Dere’s a train to Fishmarts. And dat’s vere we headed to,” the fat-man seemed to have known the answer to this question, “n’ u don’ havv to buy a dress, Jerry. Dey’ve several few ‘f dem fer’ u at d school.”

Fishmartians knew how unwilling the Hotters were to send their only kid, Jerry to Fishmarts. So they had decided on having his uniform prepared at the school itself, including any stationary and other necessary stuff required by the students.

“How did you come here?” Though not curious about that place, Jerry still thought it was a good idea to have a conversation going on to get to know more about that fishy place, Fishmarts.

"Separation."

"a-What?"

"I separated, Jerry. Separation."

This person seemed dangerous. Despite being "separated", or so he claimed, he was still alive. Or he was a total lunatic. The second option seemed more probable.

"Who are you then?"

"Yer a lizard, Jerry."

Having asked the same question repeatedly and having got the same (seemingly) incorrect answer every time, Jerry was furious. He wanted to beat the pulp out of this idiot too, but he couldn't. He would probably be arrested or something. And this wasn't the reason he was here. This wasn't what his parents had taught him.

After a bit of thinking and reasoning, he realised that, maybe, just even by the slightest of chance, he was asking the wrong question. He rephrased the question as: "What do people call you?"

"Hafbrid," replied the man with particular emphasis on the F sound. So, it sounded more like "Hafffbbrid".

*Yeah. He seems like that. That is why he was the way he was. Maybe everyone at Fishmarts was a Half-breed.* Jerry couldn't stop thinking.

"Not to offend or anything, but were your parents like you too? Half-breed!?"

"Vat's dere to offend, Jerry. Yes."

*So, not only is this man Half-breed, his parents are too.*

This man was sure weird. The one thing Jerry could think of doing was to get away from this man as soon as possible. But to where would he run? Where would he go? Everyone at Fishmarts might be like this. *That's why they hated Fishmarts.*

"So, Half-breed... what do you do? At Fishmarts—what do you do, in general?" Jerry tried to be as specific as possible. This person was an idiot. He couldn't even answer simple questions, so he had to phrase

them carefully and precisely.

"I am a goal-keeper. And lo—we have reached the railway station, Jerry."

Jerry wanted to laugh listening to his answer, but he thought of what might happen after he did. This person might kill him with a single stroke of his hand—he was alive even after being separated, or so he said—so anything was possible. He seemed a total lunatic after all. So Jerry, with all his might, tried to remain neutral and calm. Even though there was a storm inside.

*Transformer Alert: Goalkeeper Half-Breed, the same way as his teammates, was a player that had played the entire game, making the play almost as easy as a player with a better chance to make it to the first half of the match.*

—

"Which train am I supposed to go, Half-breed?" Jerry asked but got no answer. When he looked around, "Half-breed" was nowhere to be seen.

"Bumbling idiot," he muttered under his breath.

Not being used to talking to strangers, combined with the fact that he was now alone, forced him to get prepared to ask ANYONE for directions. Anyone who would help. Anyone who COULD help. But everyone seemed to be in a hurry. All he knew for a fact was that there was some train to Fishmarts, and he was supposed to be in it. This too, he knew from his Aunt. Not only had Half-breed been a total fool, but also he had just filled Jerry with what his Aunt had already told him.

Panic got the best of him, and he thought of running away. After all, he hadn't not to come to Fishmarts; he had come with an idiot—an idiot who left him in the middle of nowhere. Even though that nowhere was a railway station called Tic-Tac-Toe Railway Station, he still knew nothing. Half-breed had left him without any instructions!

*Curse you, Half-breed—the messenger!*

Therefore, he concluded that even if he ran away, no bad-luck would come to him, or his family members, or his relatives. But what if it did anyway? What if this didn't count as a valid-enough reason? That was when he decided to wait for some time if any help or Half-breed, himself, would come.

Positioning himself on a bench nearby, he remained there, in the same position for two hours straight, waiting for someone to come and take him away. With each passing minute, he was getting one step closer to an anxiety attack and was about to burst into tears when someone interrupted the train of his thoughts.

*Transformer Alert: His train of thoughts was made up of the passengers and passengers. They had a view of the city. This was his first attempt at establishing a permanent railway line, or if it could be used as a line, a very well planned route.*

## Platform Two and the Unnamed Fifths

“Excuse me, young man.” Jerry looked around for the voice, in case it was meant for him, which, in fact, was. “Are you lost or something?”

Jerry had been strictly instructed not to talk to any strangers and so, he remained quiet, not providing any answers. But with the newly found information—that the man talking to him had worn a specific uniform, black coat, and pants, including a tie, with a badge pinned to his coat with “T.T.E.” written on it, he decided to share, fearlessly, without a spark of doubt in his mind, his problem with him. He could be of some help, after all.

“When does the train to Fishmarts arrive?” Jerry asked. “Or has it already gone?”

The T.T.E. laughed so hard that tears came out of his eyes. The T.T.E. was a fully grown adult male, nearly his father’s age and height (that’s Jerry’s way of remembering people) except, he wore a different uniform. *Of course, he would*, Jerry thought. He was a T.T.E. for that matter, as compared to his father, who wasn’t.

“I am sorry kid,” he apologised. “For laughing that way but as far as I am informed, they have stopped their train service after so many kids banged their heads on this wall,” he said, pointing to a wall between platforms 2 and 3, “and injured themselves, in search of Platform Two and the Unnamed Fifths.”

"Two and the Unnamed Fifths?" Jerry asked, now feeling embarrassed. "When did it happen?"

"Yes," the T.T.E. began an explanation. "Previously on PTATUF, the kids had to walk into a wall between Platforms 2 and 3. And since, I know it for a fact that it wasn't something like Platform 2.5 which might have been just the in the middle, because that's how things normally work, they named it Platform Two and the Unnamed Fifths. Why? Because the namegivers must have been a selected bunch of insanely, crazy people. I can see you don't know much about that place. You—you've got your invitation? To attend Fishmarts?"

Jerry nodded, not wanting to provide an opportunity to the stranger to be any more comfortable with him.

"From the past two years," the man explained. "To your previously asked question. They use trucks now." The man laughed again. "I apologise. Again. But it really is funny when you think deeply about it. How would I know— you might be thinking. Don't you?"

Jerry nodded again, this time being more curious.

"You see, the trucks that they have leased for the purpose, my brother owns them—well, it's his company technically, but he, being the owner of the company, directly or indirectly, owns them. He founded the same," the man explained, with pride beaming in his eyes as he spoke. "So that. Leaving that aside, tell me if it wasn't a big, fat man who brought you here."

"...at this railway station," the man clarified.

"Yes," Jerry finally spoke, now being a little comfortable with the man. "How did you—"

"How did I know?" the man interrupted. Jerry didn't like his sentences being cut short, but since he was obtaining some useful information from this man, he thought of tolerating the same. This man was sharing something useful at least, not some rubbish "separation" or a "yer a lizard, Jerry" fact like that Half-breed had.

"I know because that man, whom you or I say brought you here, because has done the same with a few other kids in the past two years. THAT man was the reason I had to explain to those bunch as well. So here is what I think—I have a theory that he suffers from a short-term memory loss or something like that because clearly, they use a truck service now," the man ranted. "And I don't see how that man hasn't been fired from his job after not being able to perform his duties correctly. Weird people they are. The management, if any."

"Uh, okay?" was all that Jerry managed to say.

"And as I was saying, one can infer from their actions that that place isn't a very good one for schooling. I wonder why parents send their kids there?"

"Maybe because it brings bad luck?" Jerry offered, being slightly annoyed at the insult of his parents. He knew that his parents weren't willing to sending him to Fishmarts anyway, because if they were, he reasoned, he would have already known what the T.T.E. was telling him now, because, if Aunt Kinsley wasn't lying, *why would she?*, they had been to Fishmarts at their time.

"Yes. Yes. You are absolutely correct. Now I remember. I think somebody told me once—if a messenger slash invitation from Fishmarts comes to your house," the T.T.E. repeated what his aunt had already told him. "And you don't go with him—it is always him, I have been here for the past 4 years—it brings bad luck. These people are cursed. Totally cursed. Have a safe journey. All the very best young man."

"...at your adventures at Fishmarts," he added.

*Transformer Alert: The T.T.E. seemed a nice person to talk to, except for his too-much-talkativeness which was the only thing that Jerry hated about him. Even though Jerry didn't think he was the worst person on the planet, it was still seemed a great idea. In the end Jerry didn't get it, so he decided to ask the kids that would go to the next level and ask them questions about their favorite TV show and the next chapter.*

"Thank you," Jerry said, smiling from the outside—whereas the exact opposite was going on inside him. "But what am I supposed to do next? Should I go home? Or what? Should I—"

"I think it is better to remain here. Last year and the year before it, someone else came to take away the kids. After the fat-man had dropped them here. I guess they would be coming for you as well. Although I don't know much about them—yeah, there you go. See," the T.T.E. suddenly directed his eyes towards a familiar-looking figure, causing Jerry to do the same. The past two years, the T.T.E. had seen her come to re-guide the kids to Fishmarts after that fat-man had wrongly brought them here.

The lady looked old and frail, though not older than someone in their 60s. She wore a black gown that covered her entire length (even her legs weren't visible), except for her face. The only thing that appeared unique to Jerry, was a fish-shaped badge with "FISHMARTS" printed beneath the fish—pinned on the top-left side of her dressing gown (where usually the badges are pinned). Seeing her worn a black, the full-length dress had already made Jerry uncomfortable. The stupid black hat that she wore—as if all this wasn't enough, looked similar to the biggest conical birthday cap that only the birthday boy/girl was allowed to wear, except that it was fully black—only multiplied his discomfort by ten.

"It is just like kidnapping," he went on while the lady was busy searching for Jerry. "Now that I think about it, IT JUST IS KIDNAPPING."

"Pleasure meeting and talking to you," Jerry offered a hand-shake, not wanting to further the conversation. "Mr.—"

The crowd didn't seem too eager to notice the strange lady between them. No one even seemed to notice her. *Guess this counts as normal*, Jerry shook his head—agreeing to his thoughts.

"Arcturus Shack."

"Got to know a lot of things from you, Mr. Shack. Thank you."



“And you would be?”

“John Hampton,” Jerry lied, avoiding telling a stranger his real name. He had already thought of a name in case the situation arose—which, honestly, often did. He had told the same fake name to four other unfamiliar people at times.

The man laughed again. What was the deal with him? Jerry couldn’t understand. Laughing every five minutes. Who EVER did that? Well, this one did.

“Nice try, Jerry. Though you should remember to act a bit more confident when lying.”

*Change those names. You should have thought about them before.*

Jerry had never freaked out like this ever before. How could this totally unknown man possibly conclude his name? He was sure not having told him the same, earlier. Was he a detective that his parents had sent to spy on him? Why would they do that? More importantly, why wouldn’t they?

“I am sorry!” Jerry exclaimed, still maintaining a cool facial expression. “Jerry? But I am sure I just said John.”

*Remain calm. He’s not going to eat you. Not when these people are all around.*

But the man was no longer there. Just like that Half-breed. As Jerry was wondering whether he had gone crazy with people keeping on disappearing all around him, he found out that the T.T.E. hadn’t actually disappeared as Half-breed had. He had his duty to perform—had gone just to do the same.

*What just happened?*

However, he decided to stick to his position, not walking away, in case the weird lady was to come to look for him.

## The Second Farewell

**T**he freshman escorter, the lady, had fled to the station—either coincidentally, or from her past troubles with Hafbrid, or both—looking for Jerry as well as to escape from the police that Aunt Kinsley had planned on calling after her.

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“What do you mean?” Aunt Kinsley yelled at her. *First that giant Hafbrid, then this crackhead lady.* What was genuinely wrong with Fishmartians, she could never understand. Sometimes, she would be glad that it wasn’t her who went there. Initially jealous, but after having found the truth, she felt bad for her sister. After Lilium’s education was complete, she was glad that her sister would no longer be stuck at that stupid place.

Alas, she was wrong. Though it was her nephew this time—and this meant *someone from the blood.*

“...your stupid giant man took him away. What do you mean he hasn’t reached there?” she panicked.

“We are sorry for the inconvenience caused,” the lady replied.

“Sorry? You are sorry for the inconvenience?” Aunt Kinsley was now as fierce as a lion. “First, Jerry’s got missing, and second, YOUR BEING SORRY DOESN’T BRING HIM BACK. You wait...” Aunt Kinsley said, reaching for her phone.

“—I am calling the police. You people have got no brains.”

Hearing of the police, the lady disappeared. These people DID seem to have some issues with the law.

*Transformer Alert: The lady was no longer where she previously was. She was gone. Like the wind! When the sun came over, she stood at the door and looked up at a young woman in black and white with eyes that seemed to reflect the night. She couldn't take it any more. Then it was the night of the sun. She looked at her own hands, eyes only looking to see her eyes. She had seen her own skin, but her eyes were all covered in a dark cloud of dust.*

—

"There you are," said the lady, approaching Jerry. "Finally. Found you. That Hafbrid can't even do a thing properly!"

"Who are you?" answered (and simultaneously asked) a child, who wasn't Jerry but was standing in his periphery.

"You must be Jerry Hotter, the only child of Mr. Thames and Mrs. Liliun Hotter," the lady replied, reading from an A4-sized worn-out paper. "I am Deserva Dugonahull, Vice-Headmistress, Fishmarts, and your Transformer."

"Back off, lady," replied the nine-year-old having a lollipop in his mouth, standing somewhat afar from his parents. "I don't even know you. WAIT UNTIL I CALL MY PARENTS." The child pulled out the lollipop from his mouth, stuck out his tongue at her, and ran towards his mother.

Jerry silently laughed at the scene. Truly, these people from Fishmarts must have been the best idiots in the world.

Then the lady turned at him, "There you are, Jerry Hotter, the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Hotter. I am—"

Before she could have completed, Jerry repeated, "Mrs. Deserva Dugonahull. Vice-Headmistress at Fishmarts. Good afternoon."

"How would you know that?"

"You just— never mind. I am a Lizard after all," Jerry said, annoyed. Just then he got an answer to another of his thoughts:

*Who are you?*

*Yer a lizard, Jerry.*

*Who are 'you'? 'You' are a lizard. 'You' as in not-him; there must have been someone named 'You' at Fishmarts.*

*Who is that 'You' after all? The answer awaits me at Fishmarts.*

"You must have met Hafbrid then. Mr. Hotter, it seems that you have caused trouble even before your first day at school. I wonder how you will survive 10 years at Fishmarts then. But first, I have to inform your Aunt that you have been found."

*YOUR STUPID HALF-BREED CAUSED ALL THE TROUBLES, and isn't it supposed to be an 8-year term? Have the rules changed?*

"10 years?" asked Jerry in horror.

"It's eight, Mr. Hotter. Are you unable to hear in the first place?"

*So not only is this lady a crackhead, but she won't even accept her mistakes.* She had said ten years just now. Jerry could have sworn. He was regretting why that lollipop boy hadn't smacked her to the ground. It would have been a pleasure to watch and enjoy the scene.

She then turned around to leave the Tic-Tac-Toe Railway station, having ordered Jerry to follow her. It was a two kilometers-long, 15-minute walk from the Tic-Tac-Toe Railway station to the Purselys. Jerry had gotten tired of this to and fro motion, but he never complained. Not to the Half-breed or to the Vice-Headmistress. Not to his Aunt. To no one but himself for being such ill-fated.

After having bid a second farewell to his relatives, Jerry again left for Fishmarts. This time with Deserva Dugonahull, the Vice-Headmistress at Fishmarts. Aunt Kinsi immediately shut the door as soon as they were out of the house. *Did she hate them so much? That she would hate me for the same?* Jerry's eyes once again filled with tears. Hadn't his parents left him at Purselys for the same reasons? *Do they hate me too?* Tears of separation filled his eyes. Pun intended (unknown to him).

"Now, now, Mr. Hotter, you need to listen to me very carefully,"

started Mrs. Dugonahull, not noticing tears in Jerry's eyes. "Since we are already late for the sorting ceremony, we will be Separating. Now carefully put and hold my left arm with your right hand like this," Mrs. Dugonahull demonstrated. It was the same as latching your hand to your parents' hands and holding to it as you do while crossing the road.

"But what if I don't want to separate?" Jerry asked, panicking once again, tears gone from his eyes. "Can't we take the trucks?" He smiled weakly at his earlier conversation with the T.T.E., who somehow knew his name. *Had he been from Fishmarts too?* But he had been a T.T.E. He didn't seem dumb like these two were. More importantly, how did he know his name? This was something that kept Jerry's mind busy while his body oscillated from one location to another.

*Wait until I call my parents.* The child had said.

*Parents.*

"Mr. Hotter, it seems your parents have indeed taught you something about Fishmarts," she taunted. Something about her remark made Jerry cringe at the thought that there was some reason that she didn't have very high regards, or any at all, for his parents. "And for your information, as I have already told, we are getting late for the sorting ceremony."

"What—"

"No more questions," she ordered. "Just keep your eyes closed."  
And That Is What He Did.



## II

# Here We Come

*The bad days are to begin!*





## Arrival at Fishmarts

After a few minutes, when Jerry opened his eyes, he found himself in front of a vast building that almost looked like a giant mall after being instructed to do the same. A very, very big mall painted in yellow and red with “Fishmarts” written in block letters on its front. He looked around himself to find lush green grass, which honestly, according to him, looked pretty awesome. It was a place where every child would want to spend their summer vacations. The building seemed new from the outside as if it had just finished construction. On the large field surrounding the building existed big green trees, some with red, some with yellow fruits upon them. *Apples*, Jerry thought, on seeing the red coloured fruits, though not entirely sure of his decision because the tree was too distant to identify the fruit hanging from it.

*Transformer Alert: The building looked new from the outside, making Jerry wonder how it might look from the inside. It was build with a massive frame, a very, very big frame with a lot of detail. It looked much nicer in the front, but it wasn't built with a lot of detail from the inside. A huge window at the front had some very nice detail, but that didn't make any difference.*

The sky looked more transparent than ever, with the exception of some clouds of various shapes in it. Just now he realised how ignorant he had been of nature, being all busy with the rationality and logic stuff. Perhaps, this was how a fairyland looked like. A place with no problems,

as his father reasoned on several occasions.

"Perhaps now Mr. Hotter," Mrs. Dugonahull's sour, frail voice brought Jerry back to his reality. "That if you are done with your observations, we have a ceremony to attend, for which we are already pretty late."

If Deserva Dugonahull wasn't his school-teacher, as has suddenly been the case out of nowhere, and thus he wasn't her student, Jerry would have punched her so hard, for pestering him every two minutes, that she would have remembered the feeling for her entire remaining life—or would have died right there.

For Jerry, being one of those who used to work, talk, eat, and breathe in solidarity except for having discussions that were often done in his parents' presence, disturbing that persisting silence of solidarity was an unforgivable crime. Something which Mrs. Dugonahull was repeatedly committing.

As they entered the building, Jerry was once again mesmerised by the coloured walls inside. The building was as beautiful on the inside as it looked from the outside, coloured just in the way as his previous school's pre-school building. Walking through several related narrow passages, one after the other, Jerry found some "Rules and Regulations" posters hooked up on the opposite facing walls, every metre.

"Couldn't they afford a separate board for the same? It's just destroying the walls," Jerry murmured while having stopped to have a peek at one of the posters.

"No electronic gadgets allowed," read the one.

"Who brings gadgets to school anyways?" Jerry laughed. According to the disciplined, obedient child he was, bringing gadgets to school was tomfoolery. The teacher could confiscate them anytime if someone decided to rat you out. Something that wasn't worth taking the trouble. And not AT ALL, if you were that rat.

## The Great Mall

**T**he Great Mall was the most significant room inside the building—both by the surface area and the volume. About as big as ten classrooms (all the classrooms at Fishmarts were of the same size, each having a seating capacity of about 50 students in the best case, no matter what the class strength), it was a multipurpose room (being the only room in the school able to accommodate its full strength, including the staff members). The first room (and only) of its kind that the students were ever shown, tricking them into thinking how big the classrooms must be. Being the multipurpose room, the school regularly used it for sorting ceremony and dining purposes.

Deserva Dugonahull, upon reaching the room, realised how badly had the students and the teachers waited for the events to proceed. On seeing her, Callbus Rickaroll, the school Headmaster, who looked and really was older than Deserva, announced:

“The moment we have all been waiting for, has arrived. The lost student, because of whom we had been getting late for the sorting ceremony, has finally arrived at Fishmarts. My dear friends, please welcome JERRY HOTTER.”

Callbus Rickaroll, the Headmaster of Fishmarts school of Fishcraft and Fishery (called in short Fishmarts; not to be confused with the *place* Fishmarts, famous because of the school with the same name) was a man older than Mrs. Dugonahull herself, the second most aged person in

Fishmarts, making him the most senior of all Lizards (not to be confused with cold-blooded reptiles referred to by the same term). He had a big white beard, like Santa had in all his pictures, and wore half-mooned, black spectacles that he never took off to hide his squinted eyes, which made it difficult to tell where exactly he had been looking. Just like Mrs. Dugonahull, he too wore a big grey gown—except it was for men—that covered his entire body, except for his face, obviously. A hat just like Mrs. Dugonahull, except, it was grey to match the colour of his clothes.

*Transformer Alert: However, unlike Santa, Callbus had a few other issues when he opened the door, which caused him to open the door. When he opened the door, he was asked to put his hands under his waist to make sure he wasn't running. At the end of the conversation, Callbus explained that he was only able to get out of the bathroom and into the bathroom. He had already walked back, but he had to make sure he wasn't stuck there. He went downstairs and walked around looking for an unlocked toilet. However, when he looked down at the bathroom door, he realized that his face had been locked with his hands under his chest.*

Evidently, after having closed the railway service from Platform Two and the Unnamed Fifts due to previously explained reasons, the authorities had planned on starting a bus service for the same and even had. Nearly. The service was in beta-phase when it created a little problem nonetheless. A minor issue that soon became big, like a forest fire. The mischievous students started using phrases with phrases like “call the bus now” and “call my bus” or “call bus now”. And soon every single student got the hang of it! Even the ones who had no idea of ‘what used to happen at the school’.

That was it.

It was the moment when Callbus Rickaroll decided that a name like HIS couldn't bear any more insult. As a disciplinary action, he made the authorities employ a truck service, instead of those buses as a punishment—though giving them some awfully different reasons like

mileage and other totally unrelated stuff. And that's how Fishmarts got its famous truck-service, shutting down their (previously) even more renowned *Platform Two and the Unnamed Fifths* train service FOREVER.

The crowd, on hearing the Headmaster mention 'Jerry Hotter', turned its head (not really the crowd! but the people who consisted it!) in Mrs. Dugonahull's direction. Whispers increased in number, slowly becoming louder. It wasn't until Callbus Rickaroll started clapping for Jerry's arrival, that the whispers disappeared. But still, no one could see Jerry Hotter. Only Mrs. Dugonahull was in sight. Students began whispering again, which made Dugonahull realise what had been the case. She turned around 180 degrees and yelled, "JERRY HOTTER! STOP READING AND COME OVER HERE. WE HAVEN'T GOT THE WHOLE DAY."

Evidently, Jerry had been too busy reading the writings on the walls that he almost forgot why he was here. It often happened—Jerry would get busy—often reading, getting lost in a world of his own, and losing track of his surroundings.

Those words introduced the room (and its population) to a more-than-brief moment of complete silence, with the only noise coming from Jerry's footsteps. Jerry reached the Great Mall only to find a commotion waiting for him. He felt guilty for making everyone wait for him.

How-so-ever, Hafbrid was nowhere to be seen. *Does he even work here? Or did he forgot that he USED to work here until he got fired?*

"Jerry Hotter, my dear friends," Rickaroll announced, pointing at Jerry—and soon the mall was filled with the sound of claps. Jerry couldn't figure out WHY they seemed so excited at his arrival. *School rule maybe*, he thought. At "Low-High Mid High", the school he previously attended, clapping was reserved for some special occasions—like, when someone had a birthday, in which case, the student would be called upon the stage during the morning assembly, and everyone would sing a birthday song, the same birthday song for whoever had a birthday.

Or when the school basketball team won a match, which happened only once during Jerry's five years of existence at the school. Or a competition. Or for the first and second position holders from every class, which happened every year for Jerry because, well, he had always bragged the first position in his class since third grade. Now he was in eight. But this school—it was completely new. AND how did that fat Half-breed know his name? And what about that T.T.E. at the Tic-Tac-Toe Railway Station? How did people knowing his name kept popping out from nowhere? From where did people got hold of his name? He was confused. And who WAS this man addressing everyone to clap for him? He seemed like the school manager or the founder. *He must be the founder*, Jerry reasoned, because school founders were always old.

*Transformer Alert: School founders were always old because they were never young. The way they lived, they learned to make a life. By establishing schools. Making money off them. Getting into the business of making money from a small business. The good news is that they are living in a much safer, more efficient world. It is important to note that in order to make money, the best place to live is in a place that allows the best for all. That said, as long as you live in a place that allows the best for all, you need a way to live a better life and you should not be forced to make that choice for yourself.*

Jerry's attention suddenly drifted to an entirely new direction. All the students were wearing uniform, most probably, the school uniform. He wasn't wearing any. He was wearing the same clothes as he had worn at the Purselys—a round-neck, red, half-sleeved T-shirt and blue trousers (the ones that came free with his favourite track-suit). These were his favourite trousers because they came with a pocket-zipper. That way, even if he put his candies inside its pockets—they won't fall out—however fast he ran—after the pocket had been zipped closed.

“Now before we begin the sorting ceremony, I would request Mrs. Dugonahull to provide Jerry the new set of school uniform that we have already prepared for him. Also, don't forget the stationary and

other necessary material,” Callbus Rickaroll blabbered again. “Also, I would ask them both to be quick because—as she must have told Jerry a hundred times before that—we are getting out of the reserved time.”

At that instance, Jerry knew that he hated this place. He understood why there was never a mention of Fishmarts at their home.

—

Half-an-hour later, when Jerry again stepped inside the Great Mall, he was again greeted with applause. This time the claps were half-hearted, well, because kids had already grown tired of this schedule of clapping again and again. Jerry had a strange feeling in getting mixed with the rest of the crowd. He was so used to be alone that now it felt weird to be present with a bunch, a herd of kids surrounding him. The school uniform, consisting of brown pants, a checked-brown shirt, and a grey jacket with a fish-shaped logo with letters “Fishmarts” written beneath it on the left-hand side, was already making Jerry uncomfortable in the hot weather of July. He cursed the uniform designers for having designed such a uniform. However, he couldn’t understand how the rest of the students (anyone except him) felt or showed no discomfort, whereas he—on the other hand—was heavily prickling with sweat. Just watching them.

—

When Dugonahull handed him the jacket, Jerry asked her if he could not wear it as it was already quite hot. She denied him single-mouthed, saying that a uniform was a uniform. What kind of logic was that? *Curse that woman.*

—

“Now, now my friends,” Rickaroll started again. “Having already explained, this time especially for Jerry Hotter—Fishmarts school of Fishcraft and Fishery was founded by four great people after whom the four houses of the school have been named. And before anything happens, you need to be sorted into your houses, because houses are

very important as doing wrong actions will lead to points being taken away from your houses whereas doing good deeds will give your house some points. Are we clear till now?"

While other students seemed awfully happy on hearing these words again and yelled a default response of "Yes, sir", Jerry seemed relatively quiet. He internally cried at being such an ill-fated being and also for missing his family. Some teachers, already bored of this routine happening every year, appeared drowsy as if they would drop down any moment.

"Right then, these houses are, *drum roll please*," Rickaroll paused for a drum-roll to happen, which was done by none other than Deserva Dugonahull herself, hoping for his speech to quickly commence. Jerry wondered where had the drum suddenly come from—because (1) he hadn't anything else to do, and (2) it wasn't there before. "Underscore, Coughbluff, Pigeonclaw and at last-but-not-least Glycerine."

The seniors (which meant everyone except the freshmen) booed and cheered at the mention of their houses, while Jerry choked with laughter at the house names. Thankfully, no one noticed him laughing, even though he was supposed to be their centre of attention.

"Now," Rickaroll used a lot of NOWs in his speech, Jerry noticed. "Before we go on further, meet your soon-to-be head of the houses. For Underscore, it is Mrs. Deserva Dugonahull, Vice-Headmistress Fishmarts herself. She will be teaching Transformations to the first-years."

All Underscores (students belonging to the house Underscore) clapped heavily. Their claps made it impossible for Rickaroll to continue further.

"Mr. Virrel of Pigeonclaw. He would also be your teacher for Offence to the Light Fishes."

It was the time for Pigeonclaws to begin clapping.

"Thank you so much," Rickaroll said, clearing his throat to continue on. "Mr. Mad-Brain Cooty, everyone. The head of Coughbluff. Also,



the head of Roarers.” Cooty looked like an eccentric scientist that had recently escaped from the most secure prison in the world. He wore a white laboratory coat and half-mooned glasses similar to those of Rickaroll as those were the only kind available at Fishmarts.

The coat contained a badge pinned on its breast-pocket with “Mr. Cooty” engraved with gold. His name was followed by “Founder and C.E.O., Roarers” on the next line, written in gold as well.

*Is that real gold?*

At the mention of “Roarers” everyone went mad, clapping harder than ever. This even included the students that weren’t from Coughbluff.

*He sure seems popular.*

“What is the big deal with Roarers anyways?” Jerry asked to no one in particular. But there came a response—a totally unexpected one to his question.

“You don’t know? You are Jerry Hotter. Aren’t you?” A boy, somewhat bigger than Jerry, with dark blonde hair, deep-blue eyes and an oval cut, whispered in his ear. Jerry nodded positively, just because the boy wasn’t being annoying. “They have saved this school numerous times from he-who-has-got-no-name.”

Jerry laughed at the name while the boy stared at him continuously.

“There is nothing to laugh about,” the boy said earnestly. “You seriously have no idea of what this is about?”

“If I had, why would I ask?” Jerry revolted, clearly annoyed this time. He didn’t feel the need to continue to this conversation any further. People were crazy here. *And what was their stupid fascination with fishes?* Jerry, being a vegetarian, had his vision blurred, once again, at the realisation. Thankfully for him, he got to eavesdrop on a few other people who were talking about the food variety available there.

Fruits were an option. Jerry cheered once again.

“And for our fourth house, Glycerine—it is Mr. Beverous Grape. Also, the Lotions and Commotions teacher for the first-years. And for

everyone else too.”

*Transformer Alert: The four houses of the school were demolished in June 2011, according to the school's administration. The two houses were owned by the same landlord, and were not owned by the same landlord. A few years later, the school's administration said that they were not connected with the demolition. The school's principal said the school's owners, who have been active in the construction of the house since 1991, had a dispute with the city.*

It wasn't tricky for Jerry to know who was who because each of the teachers stood up from their seats upon the mention of their names. Plus, he already knew Dugonahull and Half-breed, who was still nowhere to be seen, from their previous encounters.

## The Sorting Ceremony

**I**t seemed that Rickaroll had prepared a speech to address the students as if this was his only chance. Jerry seemed too occupied with his thoughts to catch any of the words that the Headmaster spoke.

“All the first-year students will form a line. Here,” he pointed to an empty spot in the room which was soon followed by the first-year students hurrying to reserve a place for themselves, although, Jerry waited for the rush to be over. After it was, Jerry simply followed the students.

The sorting ceremony was a complicated name for “students being chosen for the houses they would exist in for the next of their life years at Fishmarts”. In his previous school, students were never divided into houses. It seemed such a foolish idea to do so.

*It isn't as if you have to Divide-and-Rule! How stupid!*

Upon getting orders from Rickaroll, whom Jerry now knew was the Headmaster (or Principal as they called in his previous school), heads of each of the houses came forwards—in front of everyone, and stood on a circle (though it looked more like a square)—each holding a big list containing names of all the first-year students.

Sorting began as soon as Dugonahull, the head of Underscore, yelled “Kevil Topbottom” and crossed a name from the list. A boy moved from his place and stood next to Mrs. Dugonahull. Kevil was the same boy

who had had a conversation with Jerry about he-who-has-got-no-name.

Sorting was as difficult as picking members for your gully Cricket team; the captain who started first was more likely to get the best players in his squad. *Best as in what? What is the Criteria?* Jerry pondered.

"Taco Machloy," yelled Beverous Grape as soon as Dugonahull was done, as to get the second chance to choose students for his house. Whoever yelled first would get the first chance to pick up a student, the next the second, and so on until the fourth head had chosen a student. The cycle would continue indefinitely—until the house heads had sorted all the students into their respective houses.

"Henna Abort," yelled Mad-Brain Cooty, while Jerry was busy silently laughing at all the names. *Who named these people this way? Cooty? Seriously? Had he been a head-lice? Maybe in his previous life? And Grape? What was the logic to pick up such a last-name for yourself? Taco, as in Taco Bells? And what about the person who had got no name? Couldn't they provide a stupid name to him too, something apart from his already dumb name.*

*How did he even attend the roll call? I think that's how the name came to existence.*

"Germione Danger," Dugonahull crossed another name from her list. A girl, about as same height and build as Jerry but lighter hair colour, began walking towards the Underscore head, while Mr. Virrel complained about not having got a chance to pick up a student for his house in the first round.

"Try to be quick from the next round," Rickaroll answered.

"Actually, it's pronounced Germany, not Germione," explained the previously chosen Underscore. Jerry laughed again. Silently, of course.

Poor girl. Her name was never correctly pronounced by anyone—when asked to do so for the first time.

Germione looked somewhat known. He kept thinking, why? Why did this girl—someone he was seeing at Fishmarts—someone he hadn't

even talked to—appeared familiar?

First slowly and then at once a realisation came to him which shocked him briefly—Germione had been THE girl he had beaten-the-pulp-out-of after she had apparently “hugged” him, obviously for a play that their school had asked the first-graders to enact for their annual function. Those forgotten memories came back to haunt Jerry. After that incident, Hermione had changed schools, and even though her face had changed a little—her name hadn’t.

“Lunatic Allisgood,” spoke Virrel quickly when his chance came in the second round.

It had almost been an hour, sorting students into their houses. Even so, the sorting wasn’t complete. Jerry had never laughed so much previously as he had in the last hour. “Lunatic” got into Pigeonclaw. A boy named “Wrong Easily” in Underscore. “Susie Loans” in Coughbluff. The rest of the names, though, he seemed too engaged somewhere else to hear.

He was still laughing when he felt everyone’s eyes on him. He was feeling correctly. Looking around himself, he found no other student left to be sorted. Apparently, since the first round had ended with no student being selected for Pigeonclaw, the distribution of students among the houses was no longer going to be equal. Also, because no one seemed interested to have Jerry sorted into their house and it was Mrs. Dugonahull’s chance to choose, she was (practically) forced to have Jerry in her house.

*Transformer Alert: Mrs. Dugonahull had been a teacher for a very long time. She was a very talented teacher, very smart, and very good at everything, and she knew what she wanted. She had a reputation in the business for her excellent teaching skills and was well versed in both the English and French language, and her reputation was excellent . She wasn’t very skilled in teaching, however. She could easily be mistaken for a teacher who knew her skills but could not use them properly. When the school was filled with people who had no interest in learning English, Dugonahull was absolutely thrilled*

*with herself.*

"This boy is going to be the death of me," she cursed under her breath. "Fine. Jerry Hotter," she pronounced and crossed-off the last available name from her list.

And that is how Jerry got stuck in Underscore. More importantly, how Underscores (and most importantly, Dugonahull) got stuck with Jerry Hotter.

## Blood Status

When the sorting ceremony was FINALLY over, Rickaroll immediately announced the Great Feast (a feast that happened in the Great Hall; so technically, every dining sitting would be called the Great Feast but whatever) to commence. The feast ended as soon as it began—with a shortage of food for the teachers themselves. The sole reason—was the school Headmaster’s underestimation of the new students’ eating capacity. It wasn’t totally his fault BECAUSE till the last year, the same quantity of food had sufficed. The staff hadn’t seen such hungry kids in all their lives, and immediately knew that this year was going to be Much-with-a-capital-m Different than the others.

And Shrek, WERE THEY RIGHT!

During the feast, Jerry, coincidentally, sat between Kevil Topbottom (again!) and Hermione Danger. The other kids didn’t seem to bother him for some reason, and he thanked the heaven above—for the reason, whatever it was. These peculiar kids occasionally chattered about the status of their families that Jerry found quite amusing and dull.

“I am half-blood,” replied an unknown kid from the same table as Jerry, in response to a question from another strange kid. Side Characters, you know!

“The Glycerines are all full-blood. No less than that,” replied another. Now the conversation seemed more interesting to Jerry because prior

to it, he only knew two types of living beings:

1. **Warm-blooded:** Mammals are warm-blooded living beings. For example, humans.
2. **Cold-blooded:** Contrary to mammals who can internally regulate their body temperature with their blood, reptiles like Lizards are cold-blooded. But these Lizards were different from the people at Fishmarts, who called themselves Lizards.

Jerry then briefly casted a look at the talking kids. The one who had told that he was half-blood indeed looked anaemic, while the ones at the Glycerine table Looked non-anaemic. But Were They Really? So, there were some new additions to Jerry's classification of beings. He also heard another term, **Puddles**—something that, until now, he had known to be a term for pot-holes that often caused road-accidents because of deposition of water inside them. **Puddles** were what Fishmartians called non-Fishmartians.

Jerry was again busy forming a classification when someone tapped him on the shoulder. He looked around to see who could have done such a deed—when he found that Germione had. No one had been friendly enough—to her—to hold a conversation; these kids seemed too busy among themselves.

“Hello!” Jerry didn't know how else to respond.

“Hey!” She chuckled to Jerry's annoyance. “So, you are a vegetarian too?” She said, pointing to Jerry's food which consisted of bread, butter, and two apples. It wasn't the best way to start a conversation. But It Was One.

“Yeah,” replied Jerry, not wanting to be confronted by her. But as soon as he thought about it—about how she was the only one from “his world”—he felt that it was better to have made her a friend. It was then that he realised that she had been sitting next to him the whole time.



“Do you have some idea of how this place works?” Jerry began, hoping she might have gained some knowledge—having chattered with other kids. “People appear weird.”

Germione shushed him not to speak out loud because she had found that their Headmaster was a very short-tempered man. If he heard what Jerry was saying, things could quickly go wrong for him.

*Transformer Alert: Hermione was a charming little girl, about two months elder than Jerry. Her parents had been in the town for a couple months before. They were still going out for a picnic, which made the entire town feel less welcoming to kids who had been around for a few days. But Jerry was more concerned with how the parents who owned the house, which has become a popular destination for people seeking to live on, might be perceived as “neighbourhood” by the kids and their family. Nothing of this made sense. The little girl was so upset that she decided to take on a role in the new movie, which takes place in the town of Amgen.*

“There are four houses here, you might have already heard him say,” she said, referring to their Headmaster. “They play a very weird game whose name I can’t remember right now. I have heard them talking about joining the house team for the same. Out of all their conversation, the only thing I was familiar with was Soccer. They have a team for that too.”

“Okay?” What was he supposed to do with a stupid game that these kids played? Jerry wasn’t interested in games at all.

“How are these people comfortable in this winter uniform?” He drifted the conversation in a different direction. “I don’t like this dress after all. But these—” he looked at other kids with disgust, “none of them appear to be complaining.”

Germione again reminded him to keep his voice low, which annoyed Jerry. There was nothing wrong when the rest of these stupid kids kept on chattering, making noises of all sorts. But whenever HE spoke, everything seemed to be wrong.

"Just saying," she said, recognising the look on Jerry's face. It was the face Jerry made when he didn't like where or how the things were going. Now she was sure that she was talking to the same Jerry who had beaten the pulp out of her that fateful day. "The Headmaster is married to the Vice-Headmistress. Haven't you seen how she treated you? She seems to have no regard for even positive arguments."

This was the instant Jerry knew that Germione felt the same way about this place as him.

"...but I don't understand," she continued. "They behave as they already know you. How?"

"I asked the same to a kid and he in turn asked me about something else. I never got my answer."

"So you don't know why you are famous?"

"Famous?" Jerry's eyes glittered in surprise. "I haven't done anything special."

Jerry forgot how he was a precocious child and The (or One Of The, if you included Germione too) Youngest Child (chronologically) to be in grade 8—and even if he had somehow remembered, he would instead have not talked about it. It seemed boastful, according to him.

"Do you know? Why?"

"No, I don't which's why I asked."

"I had the same reply prepared for that kid," Jerry turned around to point out the kid if he could. "And then he said something even more silly—what was his name again? Kevin? Nope—that wasn't his name—I am forgetting something. He had a very peculiar surname," he paused, not remembering his name. "Bottom? It was something like that."

"Kevil Topbottom?" Germione offered.

"Exactly him. Kevil Topbottom."

As soon as the name left his mouth, the kid on his left turned to face him. It was then he realised that Topbottom had been sitting right next to him (left actually!) all this time.

“Yes?” Kevil asked.

“Nothing. I was just,” Jerry quickly thought of something to say, “What was the name you told me? Who had got no name?”

All the blabbering and chattering had gone down at the mention of the phrase. Kevil immediately turned the other way as if he didn’t even know who Jerry was. The next thing Jerry remembered, was being stared at from all the directions. Jerry didn’t speak to anyone else for the rest of the day. There was something special about that name. Was it a ghost of some kid who had committed suicide on the school premises? It seemed a pretty possible option, although he had no clue or a way to find whether he was correct or not.

*Transformer Alert: Kids often committed suicide when their demands weren’t met. This was a very bad option as there was a certain risk that suicide would happen because of your efforts to help you. If your suicide was prevented, you might not get up, because the odds of you getting out would be low. There was no way for you to live a normal life without being suicidal. In this way, you’re making the same mistakes and keeping the risk down. You’re making it even harder for people to quit, because the likelihood of a suicide isn’t great.*

Or so he thought.

## The Headmaster's Office

**A**fter the feast was officially over and before a room was allotted to him, the Headmaster called Jerry to his office for some “discussion”. There, Jerry found out that a password had to be entered on the keypad that stood outside the office to get inside the office. This password was periodically changed by the Headmaster himself, whenever he found out that his office was being trashed, which happened quite often. And that meant that the current password, which happened to be “fIsHmaRts is gorGeoUS” (with all those weird capitalisation) would be changed soon. Jerry never understood why there was a need to set a password if the Headmaster was to yawn, sleep, brush, sit, and do a bunch of other crazy things—all inside his office. And in case he was too privacy-conscious, as people often are, he could simply use a mechanical lock (or multiple, if needed) with a master key that would always remain with him. Only with him. It would have been more economically viable and durable (the keypad seemed non-functioning the first two times, Jerry entered the password) that way.

“Enjoying your day, Jerry?” Callbus Rickaroll said, offering him cod-liver-capsules, explaining that these helped him in sharpening his eyesight.

“Yes,” Jerry lied, politely denying his offer, explaining that he was a vegetarian.

“Vegetarian then,” Rickaroll repeated those words exactly five times. Jerry hated having his time wasted like this. “Very few people chose that path.”

“What is the big deal with someone who has got no name?” Jerry asked.

“Sir, actually, if you don’t mind. So your parents haven’t told you anything about this place then?” Rickaroll spoke with an evil grin creeping on his face.

Jerry seemed offended than ever at the mention of his parents. If they hadn’t told him about something, it was for His good. If they HAD told him about something, it was for HIS good. Why did people seem so interested in his parents having or not having told him about this place?

Jerry didn’t say anything. He didn’t like this man, either. He wanted to get out of his office as soon as possible. He needed to get out of this place. But how? How could he get out of this place without their cursed messengers following his family? Jerry had to know about this place a little more before forming an escape plan.

When Jerry didn’t respond, Rickaroll began, “He-who-has-got-no-name has actually got a name. He is now known to the world as Dord Fortesnort.”

A smile came to Jerry’s face on hearing the name, which would have turned into a burst of laughter had he not contained it. Fishmartians had ridiculous naming conventions. Even IUPAC did better! IUPAC named chemical compounds a million times better than these Fishmartians could ever name themselves.

Upon seeing a smile creeping on Jerry’s face, Rickaroll asked, “Memories brought back, Jerry?”

“No, SIR,” Jerry mocked. In his previous school, they addressed their teachers, even the principal, with Mr. or Ms. or Mrs. followed by their surname. Fishmarts was different. Genuinely different.

“Now as I was saying,” Rickaroll continued with a serious face, while

Jerry remembered and counted how many NOWs Rickaroll had used in his afternoon speech. "He was previously known to the world by a different name. Things must have happened because of which he changed his name, which we never got to know. Nobody cared and nobody would have, had it not been for his followers."

"Followers?" Jerry was surprised once again.

"Yes, Jerry. Light times lie ahead, Jerry, all because of Roarers. You see Mr. Mad Brain Cooty, the head of Roarers is responsible for the security of the school. Security from whom? Security from Fortesnort and his followers whom he calls **the Eaters**. And they feel quite honoured. To—to hear the name from him."

*The Eaters?* Now, this was going to be something interesting.

"What kind of name is the Eaters?" Jerry asked.

"Don't interrupt me." This reminded Jerry of Mrs. Dugonahull's behaviour. Sure this man was going to be worse. He was her husband after all. "As I was saying—the Eaters. People prefer to call him by his nickname he-who-has-got-no-name because his other name is too dreadful for them to speak. It brings bad memories."

"But a rose by any other is still a rose. Whatever they call him, that name will always bring back bad memories," replied Jerry, still not knowing what those memories were. "They will associate those memories with this nam—"

*People have seen worse, if it is some food shortage that he is talking about.*

"Don't argue, Jerry. Arguments aren't of any use when you have to fight against Fortesnort. Just listen to what I am saying. He and his followers would attack people. But you don't have to worry. It's not like they are taking your life. Except—that it IS sometimes."

*Is that why I was called here? To listen to a vivid description of some gruesome murders. This man is as crazy as he gets.*

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Shut up, Jerry. Keep your mouth shut when I am speaking some-

thing.”

“But you were paused then.”

“Shut up. SHUT UP. Don’t speak a word until I say so. Do you understand?”

Jerry nodded. He didn’t want any answers now. Instead, he just wanted to be out of this room. He needed fresh air to breathe and to think. To sleep. To get out of this place. To be with his parents.

*Parents.*

“There was a time,” Rickaroll shivered, remembering their past. “Anyone who would refuse to offer them food would get killed, or worse, expelled. From Fishmarts. Dark times they were. Dark times, Jerry.”

“...But things later changed,” Rickaroll spoke, with a sudden shift to a joyous tone. “And we are grateful to Mr. Mad Brain Cooty. That fateful night, when he came to your naming ceremony,” he paused, took a deep breath, and continued—still lost in his thoughts, “Uninvited, of course. They always come uninvited, Jerry. They always come uninvited. Ever wondered how you got that scar, Jerry?”

When Rickaroll got no response for his answer, he spoke again, “You can speak now, Jerry.”

Still getting no response, Rickaroll came out of his thoughts and looked around, “Jerry? Jerry?”

Jerry was nowhere to be found. He had left the office (upon entering, he had found out that there were no checks as to ensure who was going in or coming out, as long as you know the password, which was required only for entering) upon being insulted and realising that Rickaroll had entered a stage that he called “self-thought” (Jerry often found himself at this stage), at which the subject had no idea of his/her surroundings. As soon as he found out that Rickaroll was no longer noticing him, he left for ANY place that was NOT Headmaster’s office.

“Jerry! YOU STUPID CHILD. YOU ARE JUST LIKE YOUR PAR-

ENTS. HORRIBLE THEY WERE. HORRIBLE YOU ARE," Rickaroll yelled at Jerry, who wasn't even there to discover the hatred he had for his parents. "FOOLS. ALL OF THEM. COME BACK! JERRY! AND I WILL MAKE SURE YOU..." How he wished they had never been born. How he wished Jerry hadn't existed. "All These Years, I paved in..."

The only macroscopic living being that remained in the room now, apart from Rickaroll, was a fox named Phoenix. He couldn't care less about Headmaster's sudden hyperactivity. In fact, he never cared about anything. He Simply Couldn't.



# III

## Getting Acquainted

*Making an effort is the first step to become successful.*



## The Solden Trio

“**T**here you are,” Germione came yelling at Jerry—who was sitting in the shade of an Apple tree that he had seen upon his arrival, with a boy preceding her.

“Wait for me, Germione,” the boy came running after her.

“What are you doing here anyway?” she asked Jerry.

“Nothing,” Jerry lied, hiding that he had been trying to escape the Headmaster who wasn’t, any longer, interested in chasing him.

“You are friends with him,” the unknown boy’s mouth formed an O in surprise. “You are friends with Jerry Hotter?”

“Can’t she be?” Jerry argued, even though he barely knew her—which was, however, far better than how much he knew others.

“I am sorry if I offended you,” the boy apologised.

Jerry now felt guilty for having shouted at him. “I am sorry too. I didn’t mean to yell at you and—correction—‘but’ all the emotions came combined because IHATETHISPLACE. IWANTTOGOHOME. I DON’T WANT TO BE TRAPPED HERE FOR EIGHT-WHOLE-YEARS.”

Everyone remained quiet for a long time. This, however, got over as soon as the boy and Germione sat next to Jerry. After Germione felt that the environment had calmed down, she introduced the boy to Jerry and vice-versa.

“Jerry, this is Wrong Easily and Wrong,” she too wanted to laugh at

that name, just like Jerry had in the ceremony, but she didn't. "Wrong, he is Jerry Hotter whom everyone seems to already know about. But he and I have no idea why that is the case. If you know the facts and are comfortable sharing them, we are eager to listen as well."

Jerry offered his hand, which Wrong seemingly stared at first—not understanding what he was supposed to do. But after Hermione had explained how he was supposed to shake it, he followed.

"You really don't know why everyone knows you?" Wrong asked.

"No. If any of us had known, why would have we asked in the first place?" Jerry reasoned, smiling encouragingly this time—as to offer a better first impression, an opportunity that he, unfortunately, had already missed.

Not that he cared!

"You won't be beating me?" Wrong asked, terrified.

"Why would I?" Jerry responded, while Hermione somehow looked terrified upon the mention of that word. "Unless you, like, hug me, which I guess you won't. I hate being cuddled. Everyone has a share of things that they like and dislike. I dislike being cuddled."

"Oh," said Hermione, reasoning what might have been the trigger for whatever had happened the last time—the good ol' times when they were kids.

"Well then," Wrong started nervously. "I have heard it from other people, including my parents. That is what they have told me. He-who-has-got-no-name—"

"He has got a name actually," Jerry interrupted. "Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt you but since I got to know it just a few minutes ago, I got to tell."

"I thought that was his name," Hermione joined.

"His actual name is Dord Fortesnort. The Headmaster told me. The Headmaster seems a very hot-headed man. He didn't allow me reason anything out. If he were an actual principal, by which I mean if he was in

our world, people would have gotten really annoyed of him and would have done very bad things to him.”

“I agree. That isn’t how science works,” Germione reasoned, annoyed at their Headmaster as well, whilst Wrong found their talks about Science more fascinating than what he was about to speak.

“Science?” Wrong asked, instead of continuing with his case-story.

“Yes, it is a subject taught at primary as well as elementary level,” Jerry and Germione said in chorus and then stared at each other, each waiting for the other to finish first.

“Science is the systematic study of everything that lies in and around us.” The prodigies again said this in a chorus. Jerry and Germione seemed even more surprised than Wrong, at how well their thoughts aligned.

“Okay? What am I going to speak then?” Jerry asked.

Germione remained silent and when she spoke, Jerry had already joined her, “Trick Question. I wasn’t going to say anything.”

“How?” Wrong asked, mind-blown. “How can you do that?”

“I don’t know,” Germione replied, pushing out her lower lip.

“Coincidences happen all the time. Wrong, you were about to tell us something,” Jerry reminded him.

“Oh, yes. So, he-who-has-got-no-name got beaten into a pulp by your parents when he came to your house for some reason. He somehow gave you that scar as well,” Wrong said, pointing at his head, where Jerry’s scar was.

“Okay, but first we need to verify the facts. And he has a name, Dord Fortesnort,” Jerry replied.

When Wrong seemed too scared to speak that name, Germione did. “Why don’t they call him with his original name? He is not going to come here. Is he? Besides even if he’s dangerous, calling him by any other name just means that you are referring to his original name only. It is not even a great disguise.”

Wrong seemed impressed by her speech, and it, somehow, boosted his confidence.

"I don't know—why don't they call him with his original name—I never asked."

"You should have," Jerry interjected. "Rule#1 of Science. Always question whatever you are told. Everything happens for a reason. You need to find the reason of the occurrence."

"Yes," Germione joined. "He's correct."

"Okay. I will try asking why they call him," Wrong said nervously.

"There is nothing to be nervous about, Wrong," Jerry encouraged, putting his hand on his shoulder. "Making an effort is the first step to become successful."

"Really, you aren't as bad as they told us that you were," Wrong remarked.

"What?" Germione asked, while Jerry laughed.

"Yeah. You must have seen how badly they were behaving with Jerry. You aren't as bad as they think."

That day marked the formation of a trio. A trio that was to become famous by the name "The Solden Trio".

## Rigorous Hafbrid

Their conversation later drifted to how they got their admittance letters.

“All the Lizards get their letters,” Wrong explained. Jerry and Germione had no idea of what he was talking about. “Does that mean that all those who receive letters are Lizards?” Wrong tried reasoning scientifically as Jerry and Germione had told him.

“Who is a Lizard anyway?” Jerry asked. “I know reptiles known as Lizards. Little, sticky creatures that cling to the walls. They eat insects.”

“It is obviously not what Wrong seems to be talking about,” Germione argued.

“I know. That’s why I am asking. Secondly, why do people here have an altogether twisted sense of naming things?”

“I don’t know,” shrugged Wrong. “But Lizards are the people who can do magic.”

“Magic? As In?” Jerry asked, remembering his parents’ argument with their guests. Or guest. He never knew.

“Certain things,” Wrong didn’t know what to respond.

“What things?” Germione asked. “Things like?”

Wrong thought for a while and finally spoke, “I don’t know. I have never asked like that.”

“Never mind. Did a Half-breed come to take you as well?” Jerry asked the two of them.

"I got picked by a Truck," Wrong replied quickly. Jerry wanted to laugh, remembering his conversation with the T.T.E., but he chose not to.

*Choices!*

"Me too. Not 'Half-breed' but I am sure I heard something like Hafbrid during their conversation," Germione stepped again.

"I don't know but I am talking about a fat-man who told me that he was called Half-Breed, that too even when I asked him for the fifth time, rephrasing my question as 'What do people call you?' instead of 'Who are you?' to which he had replied, all previous four times, 'You are a Lizard, Jerry.' Every single time I asked him, his replied remained the same, 'You are a Lizard, Jerry.' I don't think I felt very safe being with him. He also told me about being a goal-keeper when I tried asking him what he did for a living. I couldn't tell whether he was joking or telling the truth. He told me that his parents were Half-Breed too."

"He's Hafbrid. Rigorous Hafbrid," started Wrong. Wrong seemed to know these facts quite well, being born a Lizard family. "His accent sometimes makes it difficult to figure out what he is saying. What makes it even worse is that he often hears people wrongly. So I think that he might have meant to say Hafbrid—which is his real name, which he, every time, says wrongly by putting an emphasis on the middle F."

"Go on. We are on the same page," Jerry replied, being happy that his questions were finally being answered. It turned out that the 'goal-keeper' fact was a tautology as well. Wrong described how Hafbrid has been the only goal-keeper that Fishmarts had needed until now (since the time immemorial), or will ever need, if he never dies (which wasn't an uncommon thing among some Lizard families). He told them how, for any Inter-House Soccer Competition, neither of the four captains (the final-years) were allowed to choose a goal-keeper for their team because the spot was by-default reserved for Rigorous Hafbrid, even though he wasn't a student anymore. This pact was signed



a long ago—between Hafbrid and the school authorities—when he was expelled from the school all because of some unproven allegations from someone unknown. The legend had it that he began crying wolves out of his eyes and wouldn't stop. Fishmartians, fearing about the wolves feeding on their share of food causing the Lizard population to decrease, pressurised the school authorities to come with a compromise for Hafbrid to be allowed to live just outside the school campus (in what came to be known as Hafbrid's hut, where there was always something weird going on) and knowing how passionate about Soccer he was, the spot for goal-keeper, in all the four teams, to be reserved for him. After this was said and done, it turned out that he did absorb back the wolves (INTO HIS EYES!). Now even if, the game of Soccer wasn't fun anymore, at least the lizard population was safe.

Jerry and Hermione laughed and laughed until they were gasping for breath, accompanied by periodic stares from Wrong. Jerry went on telling how that good-for-nothing Hafbrid had dropped him at the Tic-Tac-Toe Railway Station and how he had to bid farewell to his relatives twice, forgetting to briefly mention how he had "separated" with Mrs. Dugonahull.

"And then there was a T.T.E. At the station. He knew a lot about this place. And he somehow knew my name too."

"And of course, you didn't know him," Hermione stated a fact.

"Yes! How would I know him if we haven't met before? I don't think I have seen that man previously and clearly he couldn't have been from Fishmarts because..."

*Because he seemed so logical,* Jerry was about to say but didn't.

"Because?" Hermione asked curiously.

"Eh, because he was a T.T.E.," Jerry said quickly. "And wasn't from Fishmarts, so he must not have known my name. He gave a name though, Arcturus Shack."

Wrong seemed enormously surprised at the name.

“Arcturus Shack?” he repeated, surprised, at which Jerry and Hermione looked at each other, wondering what was special about that name.

## A New Way to Classify

“I ought to have known,” Wrong commented. “He was their friend after all.”

“What are you talking about?” Hermione asked.

“Jerry,” Wrong asked, surprised. “You don’t really know about Arcturus Shack?”

“Arcturus is a name of a star,” Jerry replied, “if that is what you want to hear.”

“Stars have names?” Wrong asked again.

“They can, if you want to name them.”

“Arcturus Shack attended Fishmarts at the same time as your parents. He was their friend then.”

“So how does he know my name then?”

“He might still be their friend, silly,” Hermione responded.

“What if he isn’t? I don’t know. Why would a Fishmartian become a T.T.E.?”

“Fishmartian?” Wrong asked.

“Isn’t what they call people who live here?”

“I haven’t heard anything like that.”

Jerry realised that, probably, instead of Lizards, his parents preferred calling them Fishmartians. It was just a matter of convention, after all. Although, it might have been an insult too. Jerry didn’t know.

“Isn’t that a cool name?” Jerry offered, not knowing and not wanting

Wrong to take it as an insult.

"Yeah, it seems. Mars is to Martians. That way Fishmarts is to Fishmartians," Germione reasoned happily, which made Wrong think it WAS a cool name. It sounded cool, of course.

"It is cool," Wrong said to keep up with his friends. Peer pressure Is strange!

"So, he doesn't live here?" Jerry asked again, feeling a bit threatened. Perhaps, he wasn't a T.T.E. after all. He Talked About Kidnapping! Shack could have been a terrorist as well. But all the same, he seemed reasonable and better than others.

"He doesn't," Wrong nodded a sad nod. "And it's all that I have heard. I don't know anything else."

A gut feeling told Jerry that it was not the whole story. That there was a lot more to it. That Wrong wasn't telling them everything. Otherwise eager to know the story, being sensible, he preferred not to ask any more of it—since he felt that they had already pestered Wrong enough.

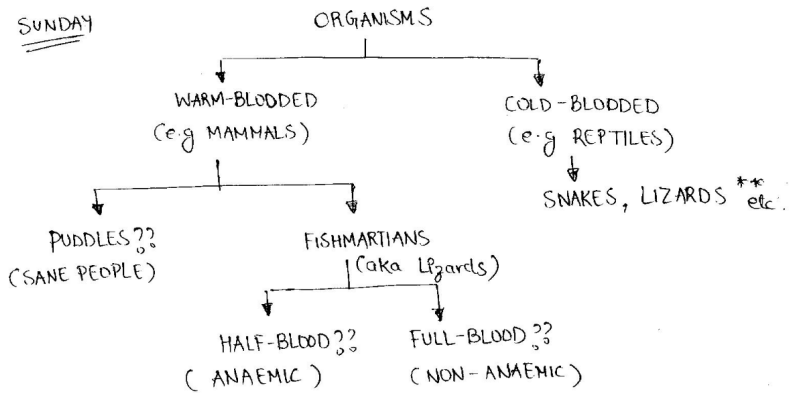
At the end of the day, thanks to Wrong, Germione and Jerry had a pretty clear idea of how things briefly worked at Fishmarts. There were some new additions to Jerry's special list, a list containing how he classified human beings, which now included:

1. **Puddles:** Normal, sane people. These are the people who aren't from Fishmarts ancestry. Puddles may also refer to a person who doesn't believe or have faith in what is taught at Fishmarts because it is of no practical use. These are mammals and therefore have warm blood. E.g., the Hotters, the Purselys, and so on.
2. **Fishmartians:** Abnormal, insane people.
- **Half Blood:** These are the people whom a person with a healthy-scientific mind, like the Hotters, would call anaemic. These are the people who need constant blood renewal because their brain

## A NEW WAY TO CLASSIFY

only gets half of what is required for its proper functioning. This explains why most people at Fishmarts happen to do idiotic things and never raise objections, even if things are being done wrongly. E.g., the unknown boy who was talking way too much at the lunch.

- **Full Blood:** These are the people who have an adequate amount of blood in their bodies. That is to say that their body contains as much blood as their brain requires. But these people are stupid as well. E.g., Wrong Easily, Callbus Rickaroll, and so on.



#NO MATTER WHAT, HALF or FULL BLOOD, A FISHMARTIAN IS ALWAYS AN IDIOT.)

\*\* Different than Fishmartians

*Classification.*

## Quit-Rage

**T**he next day—which would have been the first of his new school otherwise—by the time Jerry woke up, he realised that he was TOO late for his classes. He had missed them all—from the one that began from 7 in the morning—to the one that ended up at 1 in the afternoon (as per his time). It all happened because whenever Jerry woke up to take a sneak-peek at the wall clock (which happened to be a digital clock, by the way), it always showed that he had some more time to sleep, whereas, in reality, he didn't.

Turned out that all the clocks, at Fishmarts, only ever struck 5. So after 5:59, it would be 5 again. This was very confusing for Jerry—who hadn't noticed it until now—as compared to any Fishmartian, who were already used to their time zone. And Germione—well—she woke up seeing her roommate, who was a Fishmartian (obviously), do the same—because everyone except Jerry had got one.

Coming back from the classes, the first thing that Germione and Wrong did was to check for Jerry's awakening. Jerry was ravaging furious at them for not waking him up and kept ranting for hours about how their (time) measurement system was faulty. Germione agreed that indeed it was, explaining how SHE had woken up. After he had calmed down, they handed him a letter that Dugonahull had asked them to.. After reading the letter, Jerry, who had barely calmed down from the previous incident, boiled with rage again.

After wondering for some time about the letter's contents, everything became clear to Wrong and Hermione when Jerry asked THEM to read it. The reason: Jerry had been chosen to be a member (Creeper) of Underscore's "Quit-Rage" team.

Jerry never actively participated in sports (except for the everyday morning and evening walk that his parents took him to, if that counted) because he hated them. It wasn't like he despised them—he never considered THEM an option (finding them quite boring). Being forced to play a game, that too as an official team member, against his wishes, boiled him up. Evidently, at Fishmarts, your position as a player was fixed hereditarily. This meant that since Thames Hotter had been a Creeper at Underscore's Quit-Rage team (because his father had been one too, at his time—and so on), Jerry's spot was already reserved.

"WHAT KIND OF RULE IS THIS?" Jerry yelled.

"It is how it works," Wrong explained sadly, while Hermione argued with him saying that it wasn't her fault that the rule was in existence, and therefore he hadn't got a right to yell at her—which Jerry found quite right, and so, went quiet.

—

"You are right!" Jerry replied energetically, rushing towards the exit of the room, taking away the letter with him.

"Where are you going?" Both asked in unison.

"Some rules need to be changed," replied Jerry before going out of their sight.

—

"I wonder what he is up to now," Hermione murmured. "What kind of game is Quit-Rage anyway? It seems risky from its name."

"Haven't I already told you about Hafbrid?" Wrong started. "Soon people lost interest in Soccer so they brought up a new game. My brothers told me that it's a weird mix of baseball and tennis. Do you know what a baseball is? I don't. But I have seen Quit-Rage matches.

They happen every year—here at the stadium.”

Upon his asking, Germione explained Wrong what Baseball and Tennis were, how they were played and what rules had to be played while playing those games. Wrong, in turn, told her that for each Quit-Rage match, each team was required to have 11 players.

Any bodily movement involves risk (including Investement in Mutual Funds) but what made Quit-Rage the most dangerous activity of all time—was its *modus operandi*. It involved using the baseball bats as a racquet by each team member—with the two Creepers from each team hitting the ball to make it land on the opponent team’s side of the court, while the rest of the team members, non-Creepers (aka N.C.), were busy beating the members of other team with the spare bats. The game would continue until all of the team members of one team had lost consciousness. The Creepers weren’t meant to be harmed this way. So, being a Creeper was advantageous after all. You won’t be beaten into trash like the rest of your team members were, except if you accidentally took the ball to your head. It would be truly dangerous if you did. But no one cared for the players. There weren’t even reserves. Their need never arose. The game had to go on! Like shows always do.

Now even Germione agreed that the rules had to be changed, indeed.

Back at the Headmaster’s office, Rickaroll seemed quite pleased at Jerry’s return to his office, after he had unexpectedly left it yesterday.

—

“But rules can’t be changed that way. Rules are rules. Rules are meant to be followed,” explained Dugonahull.

“But what if I don’t want to play? The Underscore team would lose immediately, being short of one team member,” Jerry pleaded to their ego—hoping if nothing else, this would work. It worked in case of Julius Caesar, he remembered.

“No one is going to lose any team member. What nonsense! Once you have been chosen as a team member, you can’t refuse playing.”



“But the decision wasn’t even mine. I was never told—” argued Jerry.

“No arguments, Jerry,” Rickaroll intervened. “Perhaps your parents should have better thought of telling you the rules before sending you here.”

“I DIDN’T EVEN WANT TO COME HERE. MY PARENTS—”

“No arguments,” Rickaroll cut him again. “And keep your voice down. Neither was it me who decided you would be coming here.”

That was it. Jerry couldn’t bear ANY more of it. He immediately stormed out of the Headmaster’s office, leaving the couple and the fox named Phoenix in a state of shock.

Apart from other perks that came with it, it was this fox named Phoenix that incentivised people the most to become the Headmaster/Headmistress at Fishmarts. The fox named Phoenix was rumoured to grant one wish to whomever he deemed worthy. Worthiness was measured as being able to answer his riddle correctly. Being the Headmaster/Headmistress meant spending most of your time with him, adapting your brain to his, which in turn improved your odds of answering his riddle correctly. However, the only people who knew about Phoenix were Callbus Rickaroll and Deserva Dugonahull. A lesser-known fact that could have been easily deduced had the people learned about the fox was that their marriage had been entirely diplomatic, exactly like the one between Charles II of England and Catherine of Braganza.

Had more people known about Phoenix...

## The Boy who Underslept

To prevent what had happened the previous morning, Jerry stayed up the whole night. So when Germione and Wrong came to wake him up, he was not asleep. Technically.

“Jerry!” Germione yelled, sending a wave of shiver through his body. “You look like you haven’t slept at all!”

“Do I?” Jerry asked, maintaining a neutral face. “Maybe because I haven’t. I didn’t want it to be like yesterday...”

Jerry spoke for a minute, but neither of the two heard anything. Only his mouth moved, not their eardrums. A few moments later, however, he became audible again.

“...this was the only way.”

“But we were to come!” Wrong said, disappointed, simultaneously wishing Jerry would close his mouth. It smelt bad. Yuck.

“I didn’t want to waste your time,” Jerry explained, looking tired.

“I don’t think you would even be able to walk this way,” Germione blurted.

—

The first class of the day was **Offence to the Light Fishes** by Mr. Virrel. Offence to the Light Fishes, often referred to as OTTLF in short, was all about Anglerfishes, even if Fishmartians hadn’t realised this (though Jerry had, on the first day of him attending the class).

Mr. Virrel—the only OTTLF teacher in the whole world—was a

not-exactly-tall-but-a-not-exactly-short man in his late twenties who looked as if something was always going wrong with him. He always wore a scarf, a mask, a face shield, a jacket, and whatnot. Never took 'em off. And never, not even once, appeared perfectly fine and healthy. A competition on 'wearing most clothes for the longest time' would have declared Mr. Virrel as the sole winner without a second thought. You wouldn't have even needed judges! And because of this, no student had ever seen his actual face. Something was terribly wrong with this man. *Something was terribly wrong with this place.*

Being deprived of one-night sleep, Jerry had continual "outbursts" of drooling and resting-his-head-on-the-table and not-clearly-hearing-what-was-being-said. As Jerry hoped for this class to be over, the next one began—LOTIONS and COMMOTIONS by Mr. Beverous Grape. When Jerry first looked at his Lotions and Commotions teacher, he couldn't help but notice a very vague resemblance to someone he had seen priorly. But who? Jerry couldn't precisely point out. He never could.

*Arcturus Shack. Not him.*

The T.T.E. looked and sounded different.

*It is not him.*

*It's not the same person.*

*I should have slept.*

*This place sucks.*

*Sleep deprivation is real.*

*Aliens don't exist.*

*Do they?*

*If they do, 'Hello Creatures from not-my-Earth', please let me sleep and make me invisible to the world before that.*

*Then who?* Jerry yawned a lot and kept wondering till he heard his name being called out.

*Head of the Glycerine house. Is that the only time I have seen him?*

"Stand UP!"

"Yesss..." Jerry's eyes looked stark red. He had never been this sleep-deprived in his whole life.

"Sir," added Jerry, somewhat remembering the conversation with the Fishmarts' Headmaster.

"Can you repeat what I just said?" the Lotions and Commotions teacher yelled.

"Mr. Hotter?" Jerry repeated, not sure if this was the ONLY thing that the teacher had said. But he was completely sure that these were—out of all spoken ones—the words that he had heard. The Words he had heard, to be precise.

The Lotions and Commotions teacher, Beverous Grape, looked better than the OTTLF teacher, whom Jerry wasn't sure he had correctly seen having not paid attention in the previous class. A face so cherish-able that he could have easily been a model or an actor in Jerry's world had he not been a teacher at this fishy place. Just like other teachers, he wore a black dress—a black shirt, black pants, and a black cape from behind—like Superman—and a I-will-kill-you-merely-for-your-presence look on his face. Jerry felt uncomfortable—even in wondering whether it was comfortable for his teacher to wear such a uniform—if it was a dress code—and if it was, how people here could tolerate so much heat and still not sweat? If simply wearing light-coloured, red-blue clothes made Superman sweat that much, considering what would have happened had he worn all black made Jerry fill with discomfort.

Also, his skin was quite pale. Did his body lack some nutrients?

*Haemoglobin?*

*Anaemic?*

*Half-blood?*

*Nonsense.*

He was brought back from his thoughts by Hermione's nudging him on the legs. He first looked at her and then at her notebook, which read:

PISCICULTURE: the basics. PRINCIPLES OF AQUACULTURE: taxonomy of shellfish. AN...

*Selfish?* Jerry, clearly, hadn't clearly read the words.

"Some people," Grape began, while Jerry wished that he hadn't existed at all. Had he not existed, he wouldn't have been selected to come and attend classes at this terrible place.

"...pay attention."

Jerry had again missed hearing what his teacher was saying.

"Perhaps Mr. Hotter, if he is so confident of his abilities," Grape said, turning over to the students from his house, "could tell us the major point of difference between a bigger goldfish and a smaller goldfish."

Though, everyone was partial to their house at Fishmarts, no one could EVER defeat Grape—with the level of partialness he had—for his house.

He then looked at Jerry with a questioning look, with one eyebrow raised.

If somehow, Jerry had been invisible and inaudible at this moment and not the centre of attention of the class, he would have laughed his lungs out at this question. But with none of the above (N.O.T.A.) being the case, he used all his might to maintain a straight face and a straight posture.

Having not heard a reply, the LnC teacher asked again, "Do you not know an answer to such a simple question?"

Hearing this, all the half-bloods and the full-bloods were shocked. It was not easy to tell apart the difference between a giant and a dwarf goldfish. At least, according to them.

"Size," Jerry replied firmly, maintaining a stern look on his face—the one his teacher had. "The difference between the two comes because of size."

Except for Grape and the Solden Trio, everyone burst into laughter, still not knowing that Jerry had provided the correct answer.

"Sit DOWN!" Grape remarked. "And 30 points from Underscore."

Jerry didn't feel like revolting. This foolish place and their totally ridiculous rules. He didn't even care. He wasn't being awarded a million-dollar lottery for maintaining those house points.

"But sir," Germione began, wanting to verify Jerry's answer. "Isn't it correct? The answer that Jerry provided."

As if regretting her speaking, Jerry looked at Germione, reminding her that these people weren't worth the argument. But having said the words, there was no turning back now. Also, Jerry's sleep deprivation was long gone by now.

"No one will ask anything without having stood up and that means 20 more points from Underscore. What was it?" Grape paused to remember the girl's name. The only thing he remembered, however, was that it was better not to use her first name—like Dugonahull had during the ceremony. It was a total disaster. "Ms. Danger, I guess."

*Transformer Alert: Beverous Grape wasn't a fruit despite having a 'grape' in his surname. He also has a 'Grape' on his hands. It was originally a Greek word for 'peacemaker', a word used to describe the fruit. It was also known as 'fruit' because it was an early Greek word. He made a small mark in his body when he was 5 and had a 'Grape' on his right hand while none on his left.*

Jerry was actively thinking about anything interesting that would distract his mind from this foolish classroom. Anything that would divert his mind from all the fishy stuff, and then a plan came to his mind. A few ideas...

1. **The Plot:** If somehow, he could get himself off the rolls from the school, he could go back to his home.
2. **How it has to be done:** He would drain all the stupid house points from Underscore, however possible, and then Dugonahull would, herself, complain to Rickaroll about him, and then they would send him back.

3. **Alternative:** If somehow, he could annoy them so much, beyond how annoyed they presently are...
4. **Conclusion:** Annoyance is the key.

A smile crept to Jerry's lips. He now had a plan inside his head.

However, the smile soon disappeared from his face as he noticed Grape's eyes on him.

## Hafbrid's Hut

**T**he last class for the day, Grape's, was over now. Jerry was feeling accomplished and scared at the same time—accomplished for having passed a day without any trouble. He had never caused any trouble in his school, except if you counted ratting out disobedient classmates, or the time when he had beaten the pulp out of Germione, and if you really think about it, maybe a *few other* times...

Scared on dawning the realisation that if nothing was done on his part, he would have to spend EIGHT-WHOLE-YEARS here. Just then, he felt a tapping on his shoulder by someone. He looked around to find the Underscore head standing beside him.

*Transformer Alert: As the head of the house Underscore, she had just had a few hours left on her schedule and had no plan to move on but to move on, and when she came to take the bus home, she felt nothing but the smell of her skin on her skin. She had already begun feeling her body being dry and dry and she could feel a slight push to move, and she felt a little uneasy. There was an odour in the air as well, the smell of something rotting on the carpet. She felt the heat that had come from the heating and the hot air that had come from the house so quickly. This felt like a kind of weirdness that felt like an accident.*

Now what? Jerry screamed internally so hard, had it been audible, it would have turned people just next to him, a set that included Germione, Wrong, and Deserva, deaf.



"Mr. Hotter, though it has been just two days knowing you, I have got no reason to not believe that not only are you an undisciplined child but also a mischievous one. An intolerable brat."

*Right, she is supposed to be your teacher.* Jerry tried remaining calm and focused as fumes of anger rose inside him. As his blood boiled and his face started turning a deep shade of red. Tomato-red. However, only Hermione and Wrong seemed to have noticed this as the change went unnoticed by Dugonahull. She wasn't the best person to notice things.

"What happened now?" Jerry spoke in a dangerously low voice. Dugonahull thought that it would be a great idea to ask him to repeat whatever he had said, despite having heard what he had just said to tease him up. Or to test his patience. Not sure which one.

Jerry, incapable of restraining any more, burst out in the loudest voice possible:

"WHAT IS THE MAIN ISSUE WITH YOU PEOPLE?"

Having never yelled at—like this before, Dugonahull immediately went deaf. Grape, who happened to be just passing by, shut his ears and went back the other way, and despite great difficulty in communicating the idea, Mrs. D awarded Jerry retention with Hafbrid for the rest of the day.

—

"Aye aye Jerry! Nice to meet you again," Hafbrid greeted, feeling happy that at least someone was coming for him. It was times like these that made him happy—because at all other times he would be left alone in his hut, no one coming to meet or greet him. Because of some non-sense no-basis accusations, neither could he become a teacher like others, nor would any sane staff member come to talk to him—except for Rickaroll—who was (1) indeed insane, and (2) would come to pay a visit only to ask him to bring the new kids to the school, which (3) he always did wrongly, and then (4) Dugonahull would fume with anger—At Him.

Except for Rickaroll, the only time people came to talk to him were students—that too during their retention at his hut, which didn't happen very often—as they had become experts, having found ways to escape the punishment.

*Another very peculiar person who often met Hafbrid was Silch.*

Silch was the annoying hostel warden that every University has. Despite not being asked to, Hafbrid explained to Jerry how Silch had been the only warden at the Fishmarts campus—because there hadn't been a need for another one—and also because he had agreed to work there for free, given a hut JUST like his.

Jerry didn't like Hafbrid because of his too-talkative nature, and just when he thought that he had finished, Hafbrid started again.

—

“...and also, his cat Mrs. Boris, which he seems very attached to, is allowed to roam freely in the campus and is fed well.”

“But how come I see no cat?” Jerry asked, annoyed, secretly wishing for this conversation to end. He would have enjoyed this conversation to its fullest had he been with his parents.

“Dunno Jerry. ‘ave u seen green shiny eyes at night? Ven u were secretly creeping out of yo’ room?”

“Why would I secretly creep out of my room?” Jerry asked. “And no, I haven't seen any such eyes.”

Hafbrid couldn't reason Jerry. He remained shut for few minutes BUT not being able to hold for too long, spoke again, “He doesn't need to eat food cuz' Mrs. Boris and his stomach are connected.”

*Now that is just an exaggeration. What kind of creature does he want me to imagine Silch?*

Having never knowingly (or unknowingly) met Silch, Jerry concluded that Hafbrid was probably too jealous of that Silch person and therefore made talks about him. But having nothing else to do at the retention, he kept quiet and listened.

"How do you know Silch?" Jerry asked absent-mindedly.

"'ave you seen 'nother hut whilst yo walk 'ere? He lives in dat hut."

*Of course, he would know. They are neighbours. Come on, Jerry. Reason out.*

"Nother? I saw two huts excluding yours. That makes three of those." Hafbrid gulped.

"Three, Jerry?"

"Yes three. Tres. I am sure I saw three huts 'whilst yo—I mean, my walk here," Jerry stuck to Hafbrid's words, knowing he was no less than an idiot. "One is yours. And then—as you say—the one beside you houses Silch and his cat, if what you say is right. That's two. That leaves one more—the third hut. Whose is it?"

Jerry noticed Hafbrid's face grow pale in horror.

*That's interesting.* Jerry noticed.

"You alright?" Jerry asked as politely as he could. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"She is an Eater," Hafbrid shivered as he spoke those words.

Despite initial reluctance, Jerry somehow confidently placed his hand on Hafbrid's shoulder and tapped to comfort him.

## Scrubbers

**I**t was after Jerry had come back to his room (at 5 o'clock, of course—that was the only time those clocks displayed—though it had grown dark outside, which, therefore, meant it had undoubtedly been later) that he had become more furious than ever.

He had just served punishment for a crime that he didn't even commit.

"Oh, so it was you two who trashed his office room," Jerry remained to his calm. He decided not to waste his energy anymore—shouting at these people. He had to learn to control his anger. If people came to know about his anger, they would always find ways to make him angrier, he reasoned.

"We are sorry, Jerry," the Easily twins explained, while Wrong and Germione remained dumbstruck seeing the two do so—even though Wrong was the one to have asked his brothers to apologise once he got to know what they had done. Wrong had never seen the twins apologise—they never got caught doing anything out of order!

Jerry was right. He HAD tried to reason with Rickaroll that it was no wise to set a password on a shady keypad to regulate people entering his office—but reasoning with a Fishmartian—When did it ever become useful? It was easy for anyone who knew the password to enter the room and ransack its contents. If that was the case, then someone—who had even once gone to his office—which was, like, everyone!—already KNEW the password, given that it hadn't been reset by then.

—  
“He has never caught us or anyone entering his office. We didn’t think he would be able to—this time either,” Greg, the sensible twin, explained nervously.

Forge was more of an idiot. Between the two, he—was the one who came up with the plans—currently scratching his right ear.

“That’s fine. It’s fine,” Jerry lied, maintaining a straight face. *Vengeance* was the only thing he could think of at that moment.

*Sweet Vengeance.*

The twins had an appearance similar to Wrong, despite being four years senior to their younger brother—light-brown hair, same house as Wrong—and this meant that they shared house with Jerry too! Idiots—like any other Fishmartian. Height—about Lilium’s—though a bit shorter. Much shorter.

*What else? What else?*

*Nothing interesting.*

*Is that it?*

*Yes.*

Jerry answered all his questions himself, not wanting any other Fishmartian to be involved with him.

“So, are you not angry with us then?” Greg asked with a serious-looking face, while Forge was busy making some other plans—after having scratched his nose—which was now bleeding. However, no one noticed because he quickly hid the bleeding behind his hanky!

“I guess not.”

“Really?” Greg asked again with a questioning look, somehow knowing that Jerry was lying.

Jerry cleared his throat before saying, “Well, to be honest, I am angry. Though I am trying not to be. It’s not just you, it’s...” He was about to blame some Fishmartians, but then he thought of the possible consequences.

*Would it help in achieving success earlier?*

*Probably not.*

*Then it's of no use.*

*Alright.*

"It's just me."

Germione and Wrong were surprised observing a sudden drift in Jerry's mood—from a boiling rage to having-heard-a-funny-joke one. "I am sometimes unable to control my frustration. I guess it's bad to be angry at all times."

"Thanks Jerry," Still feeling guilty, Greg thanked apologizingly—for forgiving them, asking Forge to do the same. A truce was just made between the three.

—

Having all apologies done, they turned to Wrong—asking if he had seen Scrubbers.

Jerry laughed at the name but stopped when he looked at Wrong's grave face.

"Would you like to hear my joke too?" Jerry lied. It wasn't a joke he suddenly remembered that had made him laugh—it was the fact the Easily twins were asking their younger brother if he had seen some dishwasher.

What was their plan now? Jerry kept wondering but stopped when he heard someone panting heavily, crying for help.

"Easils! Where have you gone now?" the same voice asked.

"What else have you done?" Jerry joked to the twins. "Someone else is looking for you."

"They do a lot of things," Wrong explained sheepishly. "It could be anyone."

"Wrong is right this time," Forge teased him.

"So you don't know whose voice this is?" Jerry asked in surprise. *Isn't four years a long enough time to know at least a million people? So not only*

*are they idiots, but also forgetful.*

"Aaaa. Where are you chumps?" the voice came once again.

"Which voice?" Germione asked, feeling that this conversation was already going on without her.

"Which voice???" Jerry questioned in response. "It wasn't too loud but neither was it too faint. Audible enough to be heard."

"And what did it say?" Greg asked in surprise.

"No way you didn't hear that," Jerry said, puzzled.

"Where have the fools gone now?" the strange voice repeated again. "Oh no. She's close."

Jerry heard the voice again and went outside to locate the source. "There!" he pointed to the source of the voice, somewhere far right in the corridors, and immediately rushed towards it. When he got there, the voice appeared again—this time from Downstairs.

—

Then down he went,  
First to far right.  
A draped frame at sudden  
Appeared in sight.

—

The voice was coming from beneath the shiny red curtain. Satisfying his curiosity, Jerry pulled the curtain up—only to find a grizzly brown rat with a lot of bald spots. The rat had covered his cute, little, shiny, black eyes with its cute, little, grizzly brown hands—shaking vigorously.

"A mouse that can speak?" Jerry wondered. "That's the most amazing thing I have ever seen in my life."

"Foolish child," the rat cursed realising that his cover was up—and sped away from the place to any entrance that he could fit himself in and pop out to the other end. Just as he was gone, a pair of shiny green eyes came following, attacking Jerry in the shoes because of the rat's smell that arose from them. Fortunately, the cat couldn't hurt Jerry as

he kicked her away before she had a chance to.

*Transformer Alert: The talking mouse was a little rat who could talk. It didn't do much good for a number of reasons, though. He didn't have enough of a sense of humor and that didn't make it any easier for him to use his mouse, but there were two types of things he could do. One was to tell his friends that they had to be good and not bad, so he would make him use their mouse instead. This was actually a very big problem, but not that it's bad for him, because he couldn't understand the idea of being good and not good. And the other was that he was an incredibly skilled mouse, but he didn't have the ability to do that without having experience with it, even if he had learnt the mechanics.*

"Why everyone here has to be so annoying?" Jerry yelled. "Even the animals!"

The velvet brown-furred cat followed the mouse—herself being followed by Jerry. The rat took a few turns here and there, and the cat followed. She hadn't planned to let her prey go free this time. For hunger's sake.

They three went all the way round that floor—finally climbing the stairs from which Jerry had come down.

"Scrubbers!" Wrong remarked as soon as he saw the rat approaching him. Hearing him, the twins and the left-alone-Germione followed too.

Breathing heavily and chasing the cat, Jerry alerted Wrong from somewhere far right.

"Get aside Wrong," Jerry shouted. "This cat is crazy."

But before anything could have been done, the cat nabbed the prey in her paws and swallowed him as a whole.

"SCRUBBERS!" Wrong went into a state of shock, realising what had just happened.

"Scrubbers?" Jerry asked, eyeing the fat cat—who was now licking her paws and savouring the flavour—and remembering the chain of events that had led to such a conclusion.



—

Being a conservative family, and therefore, to conserve each penny that they could, the Easilys avoided buying things that were of no use to them. However, despite having such a gifted brain, they never used the knowledge gained from Fishmarts for practical purposes like creating food (they still bought food), dressing themselves up (they all did it manually) or to never die. Or even to wash their dishes. Scrubbers—over the years, had become a really worn-out rat—been passed from generations to generations in the Easily family. As the name suggests, the Easilys used Scrubbers for the only purpose of washing the dishes. Scrubbers tired of this, had often attempted to attempt suicide, whenever he broke free, but failed miserably every single time. The Easilys had kept him in a secured environment to not let him run away, not wanting to waste their hard-earned money on buying a dish scrubber.

Poor Scrubbers. That is how he met his end.

## Parselcheek

**Y**er a Parselcheek, Jerry!

“Hey,” Jerry comforted Wrong after he had stopped crying.

“I didn’t know that you had such a talented mouse. Can every mouse at Fishmarts speak human or was yours special?”

“A speaking mouse?” the twins rejoiced. “You mean Scrubbers could speak?”

“Whaaatt?” Jerry jerked. “Are you playing tricks on me?”

“I didn’t hear him speaking,” sobbed Wrong. “My whole life. He never spoke to me.”

“I could have sworn that Scrubbers practically cursed me after I raised the curtain he was hiding beneath.”

“Really?” Germione regretted not having heard the mouse speak before he had died. *What if he was the last descendent of a unique mouse tribe that spoke human? Oh Ho! I should have heard Jerry.*

“Why was it that we never heard him speaking? And second, he was a rat. There is a difference between the two,” Greg spoke thoughtfully.

“Greg, who is a Lizard, anyway?” Jerry thought that Greg, being elder—and more thoughtful than the IDIOT Forge—might provide him with some unique insights.

“Lizards are people who can do magic,” Greg explained.

“Like?”

“Create food? Where else do you think the food comes from?”

“Uh—the trees.”

“Not the trees. It comes from magic.”

*Why did I even expected anything better from you?*

“And who is Full-blood?”

“Full blood is someone whose parents are both non-half-bloods i.e., to be a full blood, your parents have to be a full blood too.”

*Excellent definition! I was better off not knowing this.*

“That’s recursive. Isn’t it?”

“Recursive?”

“That definition is repetitive. It will go on for ever.”

“Would it?”

“Wouldn’t it?”

“What?”

“Yes. It would,” Jerry simplified his answer, understanding that Greg wasn’t understanding. “A recursive definition involves using that term to define the term itself.”

“You seem rather knowledgeable,” Greg seemed impressed.

“It’s nothing like that,” Jerry blushed. He hated—got annoyed—when ever he was praised. “Anyways, where did that cat come from? I don’t see this as much of a cat-place.”

“You don’t know her?” Forge joined the conversation out of nowhere. “Mrs. Boris, Silch’s cat.”

*Shiny green eyes*, Jerry remembered Hafbrid’s description of her.

“Oh, so she is Mrs. Boris,” Jerry exclaimed. “Then is it true that her stomach is somehow connected with Silch’s?”

“We’ve heard the same,” Forge nodded.

“But that doesn’t mean it would be true? Does it?” Jerry reasoned. The Easily twins—fine—Greg seemed to have some sort of reasoning capabilities.

“It Is True,” Greg started. “No one has ever seen him eat food. Ever. The only thing he ever asked for was a hut, just like Hafbrid’s. He was

quite jealous of him that time.”

“When?” Germione asked before Jerry could.

“After Hafbrid was provided a hut of his own—just outside the school campus—he asked one for himself too.”

*And here I was thinking that Hafbrid was the one to be jealous.*

“And his cat?”

“And his cat. Mrs. Boris.”

“What is wrong with people? This’s crazy!”

“Is it?”

“Yup. It is. Indeed crazy,” Jerry joined.

“Whatever you say.”

There was a long awkward pause for some time—with everyone busy digesting the facts they had just exchanged. Except for Wrong. He was busy lamenting the loss of their pet dish scrubber, *Scrubbers*.

## The Machloys

A week passed with some troubles for Jerry—nothing too big, and the day marking the beginning of Quit-Rage practice arrived.

---

“The second half of the day and the subsequent days will observe the practice to be done for the upcoming Quit-Rage match,” Mad-Brain Cooty, the Quit-Rage coach, announced during lunchtime.

“That is cheating. That is injustice,” Jerry boiled.

“What happened?” Hermione asked, concerned. Wrong wasn’t there to ease the tension with another of his stories. He was to serve retention in Hafbrid’s hut for not having done his *homework* correctly.

“I have zero interest in playing this game or any game for that matter,” Attempting to keep his voice low, he hissed.

“Is it transferrable?” Hermione thought for a while before speaking. “The post, I mean.”

“It would be great,” Jerry cheered, hoping that it was indeed the case.

“Glad to hear it, Jerry,” the twins joined them out of somewhere, obviously. “You happen to be one of the Creepers for the Underscore team.”

“How would you know?” *Yeah. Wrong obviously.*

“What else do you think is the house board supposed to do?” Greg joked.

"Really? They have house boards," Jerry recalled, not having seen any house board anywhere.

"Dugonahull's office."

"Is that where the house boards are?"

"No. Just the Underscore one."

"Oh really!" Jerry's face grew sober. "Listen, is there some way to not play in the team?"

"Didn't know that you were such a coward, Hotter," an unfamiliar boy, of about the same height as Jerry, with shiny black hair remarked. He had seen the boy in his class but had never asked for a name. Jerry was never interested in knowing and remembering people's names.

*No. He is not Kevil Topbottom.* Jerry searched his brain for any possible matching name.

"Whatever be the case, it would be the Glycerine team who wins," he continued and stopped with a mischievous smirk on his face.

*Transformer Alert: The shiny black-haired boy was a bright-skinned man in a red shirt and an even older grey beard. The boy, who had been named to his father's surname after his father's death, looked like he was an ordinary human, and was wearing a black t-shirt and a red shirt. He wore no ties or a hoodie, and he wore a large red belt that he had stolen from the mother of his son's daughter.*

After what Jerry had thought the boy had stopped, he deduced that the boy must be from the Glycerine house. Whatever house he belonged, a Fishmartian could only be an idiot. Practicing to control over his anger had been helpful at times like these. Fishmartians weren't worth the argument. Therefore, after thinking for a while about what to reply, Jerry spoke, "I don't really care."

The boy, on the other hand, had hoped for a verbal fight to begin. Thinking of how much the Headmaster and the Vice-Headmistress despised Jerry, he had planned of making him suffer in front of the whole school. But on the contrary, not only had his plan failed but also

had his reputation among the others.

The boy had been none other than Taco Machloy, or as he was informally known: Machloy, the Junior, or the Younger Machloy. He was the youngest member of the Machloy family, which consisted of three members:

1. Lustrous Machloy [Papa Machloy or Machloy, the Senior]
2. Daffodil Machloy [Mama Machloy]
3. Taco Machloy [Baby Machloy or Machloy, the Junior or the Younger Machloy]

The Machloy family was an ideal example of patriarchy as Daffodil's opinions on *how their son would grow up* were never heard. Lustrous, the head of the Machloy family, had very blonde, lustrous hair. Being a Fishmartian that he was, he was known to have used and continued using shampoo from a particular brand that happened to be very expensive. Everyone else, although Fishmartian, was either:

- Smart enough to not fall into the trap. Or,
- Had no excess money to spend on such stupid things.

Lustrous, lacking brain worse than anyone else, had two ultimate plans for his son:

**#1:** To grow scalp hairs of the same colour as his. What Lizards didn't know was that these traits were decided by the genes that a child inherited from his/her parents.

**#2:** To be an Eater like him upon growing up. Being an eater came with an advantage: free food. You would not have to spend a dime on food again, if you were an Eater. Lizards would happily, willingly or unwillingly, be offering you their share of food, fearing their deaths or worse, expulsion from Fishmarts.

A nearly unknown fact about the Machloys, not known even to them, was their correspondence with an Eater named Ballot Strangle. She happened to be somehow related to Machloys, Taco's long-lost aunt, but could never prove so. If she had been intelligent and lucky enough to have confirmed the mentioned fact, she would have been entitled to one of their rooms, which were more luxurious than the hut she currently lived in, just outside the school campus, like Silch and Hafbrid.

That's correct. The third hut, about which Hafbrid seemed too scared to speak, belonged to Ballot Strangle.



## Doubts I

While the students waited for their OTTLF teacher to arrive, Jerry was generating and discarding the lies that were more likely to land him in trouble for not attending the Quit-Rage practice. Being lost in the lies and webs of deception, Jerry failed to notice the amount of time that had passed that day.

“Thought of something?” Hermione hadn’t spoken to anyone that day. The only people she was used to talking to were Jerry, Wrong, and sometimes, the twins—excluding Forge.

“Still doing that. Do you have any suggestions?”

“You might not like it. I don’t think that it’s very practical.”

“I would hear any suggestion as of now.”

“Retention,” Hermione said, not sure if that was a feasible option.

Jerry paused to think how that might work out.

“It could work a day or two. Not any longer.”

“That’s what I was thinking as well. Also, the teacher didn’t arrive and the class is about to get over.”

“How would you know when the class is to get over?” This was something that Jerry was dying to know. If there was some way...

*Transformer Alert: The classroom was used as a substitute for the other classes. The students were taught in the classroom, but this was later changed. A lot of the students were not allowed in the classroom, and there were more students outside the classroom than in the classroom. There was also the*

*addition of a separate section to the classroom where the students were taught the same thing in all of the classes. So we have a lot of students who were not able to attend the same classes, but were able to attend at the same time.*

"There," Germione showed Jerry the digital pendulum clock—which similar to the grandfather's clock—seemed attached to the wall in front. The pendulum was a dummy one—the digital display was the actual working part— the part that only ever struck 5.

—

"If they get to know the real reason, they would grow more mad than how much they already are—and something tells me I wouldn't like it if it happens. If somehow it was possible to transfer the tag to someone else! People here seem to be crazy to play for the team. Would you like to play for the team?" Jerry asked, even though he knew the answer.

"What? No. I would be crazy—in a bad way—to say yes. I could have had second thoughts had I not known the true nature of the game. But now that I do, Not At All."

"Still these people remain oblivious to the dangers that lie ahead."

"They do," she agreed. "But I don't get it— why? It's not like they haven't have got any brain—"

However, before the class or Germione's sentence could get over, Cooty arrived with a "supposedly" important announcement:

"We are beginning in 20 minutes. The respective team members are hereby informed to collect the passes from my office immediately."

Having said the words, he left.

"Apparently, breaking bones seems more important than mending the same," Jerry cursed no one in particular.

The non-teammates appeared more excited for the practice than the team-players who were, on the face of it, meant to perform on the field.

"Why do I feel confident of them missing a certain part of their brain?"

"You are not alone."

And the students left to collect their passes before Grape could arrive.

All but Jerry. Because once the LnC teacher arrived, he would allow no one to leave.

“Anyone else left?” Grape asked, having entered, explicitly looking at Jerry.

A cloud of doubt engulfed Jerry—freezing him in place—should he go or not? If it all was upon him, Jerry would have banned this game, this place, these teachers, this profession, and whatnot.

Jerry looked at his teacher with his large innocent eyes. *Would he help me?*

*Please help me. I am stuck. I do not want to play. I do not want to exist here. I want to go back.*

“No one then,” Grape smirked, not as evilly as Rickaroll. “And retention, Mr. Hotter, for the various crimes that you’ve committed till now during your stay. You will be joining Me after the class commences.”

If it had been any other occasion, Jerry would have wished ill for the speaker. But clearly, this wasn’t one of those usual cases—this was an edge case!

Jerry was surprised—and immediately thanked the supreme being—if he or she existed, or even if not—for having listened to him. His benchmate, Ms. Danger, seemed equally as surprised—*It worked for today!*

It was now time to devise a plan for the next day, having solved the current issue.

*Is he a mind reader? No way.*

Being on the front bench, Jerry turned around to have a look at the current configuration of the class. Taco Machloy wasn’t there anymore. He had been there before. *Too much arrogance is never good, fellow classmate. Never.*

Jerry decided to test his hypothesis whether his LnC teacher was indeed a mind reader or not. Dugonahull was supposed to be something like that. *What was that? Trans—fat. No. Transformation. Something closer.*

*Transformer. That's right. If this place had a talking rat, it might equally have a transformable human and a mind reader and a flying pig or a jumping goat. And for some reason, they don't seem eager to ask for school fees!*

Shrek! Schooling was expensive otherwise!

—

Jerry, to confirm his hypothesis, waited for the next time to have an eye-contact with his teacher. Good for him—the opportunity arrived soon.

“Shellfishes are invertebrates having an exoskeleton giving them the appearance of having a shell that is Actually A Shell that we know as Limestone. It includes...”

Grape stopped speaking soon as he noticed Jerry looking at him, badly wanting to ask him something.

“Problems anyone?” he asked, even though he knew the only one who was going to ask anything was Jerry.

Jerry looked him in the eyes and bore a thought:

*Do I know you? Not from being a subject teacher but from some previous experiences?*

“Now, I don't,” Grape started quite loud and dropped his tone for continuing his statement, “think that we have any questions.”

*Isn't that weird? Is my body language so obvious? Or a simple trick from human psychology? Well, if you are Fishmartian, you wouldn't be knowing anything about Psychology. Would you?*

*Contrarily, it could be something totally dumb.*

—

At his office, Jerry couldn't stop his mind from remembering something vaguely familiar about this man. *His face—I am not so sure—but it has to be him—I have seen him somewhere. Why don't people just let me know? I don't have time to waste.*

*It would be wrong to disturb him. And that too when I am not even sure.*

“Sir?” Jerry could stop his urge no more.

The teacher lifted his eyes up from the book he was reading.

“Yes, Mr. Hotter.” His voice, this time, was the direct opposite of harsh, as it used to be in the classroom.

“Is transformation really— a thing?” Jerry asked hesitantly, instead of approaching with his actual question.

“What do you think?” Instead of giving a response, Grape gave him a question to wonder about. Because time had barely passed and the wall clock displayed 5:14 (3:14 in the afternoon), Jerry calculated that he might have some more time to kill.

“I am not sure. I—I can’t say anything.”

“Never saw ice transform to liquid water? Or liquid water to vapour?”

*Transformer Alert: Transformations, the subject as a whole, dealt with the nature of the matter of the material nature of the body and the matter of its soul. In fact, the very idea that the mind was a part of the soul was something different for people to believe in. As far as the person was concerned, no matter how far from the mind the mind was concerned, it wa not only the subject of mind but also the subject of the soul.*

*How would you know that? They don’t know these names. Do they?*

“I have. Is that what transformations is about?” Jerry replied.

“Isn’t it?”

“It is. But with twisted naming conventions everything changes.”

“No idea. It would be more appropriate to ask the subject teacher.”

*Could it be possible that you are a mind reader?*

“I wouldn’t say anything without a proof,” remarked the teacher.

Jerry suddenly felt that he was better dead than alive. *Does it not seem like he is describing his previous statement?* Jerry hoped it did.

*How are you doing this? I want to know the underlying mechanism.*

“I don’t understand how you got stuck here,” Grape chuckled, despite not enjoying the conversation. “How do you think all of this... works?”

*It has to be a coincidence.*

Not hearing Jerry’s reply, Grape repeated, “Take a guess. An educated

guess. People love to call them coincidences but that's not the right term."

When Jerry didn't say anything, Grape had to look at him—to make sure he was still at his place—that he hadn't repeated the incident from the Headmaster's office.

"Mr. Hotter?"

"Yes, sir?" Jerry had trouble forming a reply. "They want more Marine Engineers?"

"Marine Engineers? No one actually knows about them."

*Then how do you?*

## We Have No Idea

“J<sup>erry?</sup>”  
“Jerry!”  
“JeRrY.”

Jerry woke up to the yelling of his name by two familiar distinct voices. He still felt weak waking up.

“Jerry!” Germione rushed to hug him tightly. He could barely breathe now. Wrong was standing beside her smiling as well.

“Germ—” he said weekly. “Difficult to breathe.”

“Oh. I am so, so sorry,” said Germione embarrassingly, losing her grip on him. “We thought we lost you.”

“Yeah.” Wrong couldn’t agree less.

Jerry struggled to keep himself up as he went to look out of the window on his right. Sliding curtains to a side, he found that it was still pitch black outside. His room belonged to a lesser illuminated part of campus, and hence, it was almost always dark, rendering him incapable to, otherwise, differentiate between not-so-early morning or night.

“It’s not morning yet,” Jerry half-questioned, half-answered.

“It is about to be mid-night,” replied Germione looking at her wrist-watch.

“...and it is now,” replied Jerry, as a series of beeps came from Germione’s watch, and then smiled.

“That’s correct.”

"How would you know that?" Wrong asked, puzzled.

Jerry looked at Germione, who was looking back at him. The two had a staring contest—deciding who was going to provide an explanation to Wrong. Without any exchange of words, it was agreed upon that Germione would, as:

1. It was HER watch.
2. Jerry was too weak to explain.
3. Germione should get a chance to explain things as well.

—  
"You two should better go to sleep," said Jerry as he felt a surge of energy rushing inside him.

It was about to be one in the morning.

"You should first," the two replied back.

After a long session of accusations and reasoning, both the parties arrived at a compromise—that no one among them was going to bed until they had got their answers.

—  
"I don't know," Jerry explained.

"But you ought to. People don't faint now and then."

"I would agree with her too."

"Trust me. I have no idea," Jerry protested.

"You were at retention. More like detention. What happened there?"

Jerry stood quiet for some time, recollecting what all had happened there. *How could he have been so forgetful?*

"Jerry?" Wrong's remark brought him back from his thoughts. "Did something bad happen?"

"Something did happen there," Jerry replied as if he wasn't in his senses. "I was at retention. Who brought me here?"

"We didn't."



“That is not helping. How did I come here?”

“We came as soon as we heard that something had happened to you. Dugonahull—how I wished she had gone deaf—Mrs. Dugonahull told us that quote-unquote ‘That friend of yours’ and then she coughed badly and then started again ‘well something has happened to him. He’s at his room now,’ and then she stood there for quite some time, pale as a ghost and began again, ‘I think he would have got his lesson now.’ Yeah. That’s it. I think that was it. And then she walked away, rapidly,” detailed Germione.

“Wow. That,” started Wrong. “Was. An. Accurate and an exact description of what we heard or saw.”

“And I forgot,” Germione said, now remembering something else as well. “Wrong I hope you don’t mind me saying this—THAT WOMAN IS A CRACKHEAD. She scolded us for you,” she looked at Jerry, “not going to the Quit-Rage practice, yesterday. We told her that you had a retention, more like detention, with the LnC teacher and then she yelled that we had no right to defend you to which Wrong replied that we weren’t defending you. And then she scolded Wrong for being in our company and that we had no right to argue with her.”

“I am sorry for you getting scolded for something you didn’t do.” Jerry clenched his fists so much so that his knuckles went white. He wanted that to punch that woman so hard that...

He couldn’t even complete his threat.

“What is that?” Jerry’s face bore a surprised look on his face as he noticed a glittering white envelope on his table.

“That? Someone had slid that under your door and so we put that on your table. For better attention. It comes as a surprise to me that you have just noticed it,” Wrong remarked.

“I bet it’s from Dugonahull. What do you say? I bet it has something to do with the game practice.”

“We have no idea.”

—

"I don't think it's from her," Jerry confidently spoke as he read the contents of the envelope.

"How can you be so sure?" Germione asked. "I mean—if you don't mind sharing."

"And I am not even sure if this was meant for me."

"Why would you say that?" This time it was Wrong who spoke. "It wouldn't have been slid to your room if it wasn't yours."

"Then I would say that the postman was mistaken. Who is the One-Eyed Prince, by the way?"

"One-Eyed Prince?" Wrong laughed. Jerry and Germione joined him too.

"That is what it states here," Putting the envelope aside, Jerry showed them the letter.

'One-eyed Prince' was beautifully written on the back of the letter with sparkle-pens, and the front contained three words:

We were successful.

"Do they have computers here?" Jerry asked, noticing the font.

"I don't think this was done using a computer," remarked Germione. "Look closely at the dents. It could have been a typewriter. I am sure it was a typewriter."

At her remark, Jerry looked carefully at the paper—it wasn't smudged like a printed document would be, if the ink leaked or was in excess—all the "printed" letters were, in fact, impressed onto the sheet.

"What is a typewriter?" Wrong asked.

"I was going to ask you something on those lines," Jerry said, later explaining to him what a typewriter was.

—

"I don't remember having seen one. I don't think we use it here."

"How could you not?" Germione said grudgingly. "The invitation to Fishmarts, that must have been done with a typewriter."

"I don't know."

"Either someone named One-Eyed Prince wrote this letter or someone addressed this to him," Jerry deduced.

"It could be a 'HER' too," replied Hermione.

"Wouldn't that make it One-Eyed Princess?" asked Wrong.

"Twisted naming conventions," taunted Jerry. "I think we have got a mystery to solve."

*Why does Wrong always have no idea about anything?*



# IV

## Inside Out

*A cat delivers those?*



## A Beautifully Foolish Endeavour

“What happened to the three of you?” asked Lunatic Allisgood, concerned with the looks the three were having on their faces.

“Who are you?” Jerry asked, only to later embarrass himself.

“I am Lunatic Allisgood,” the girl replied, offering a hand, which Jerry reluctantly shook.

*I hope you don't turn out to be one.*

“And I am Jerry Hotter.”

“I know.”

“Oh,” Jerry quickly wanted to get out of the conversation. He didn't like talking to Fishmartians, especially if someone had pre-declared themselves to be a lunatic. But she didn't look like one. She looked as normal as any 10-year-old would look like.

“I am looking for my letter. It ought to have reached by now but it hasn't. Have you seen my letter?”

“Why?” asked Jerry urgently. “Does the postman often mis-deliver those letters?”

“Postman? What are you talking about?” Lunatic asked in surprise.

“Who delivers those letters?”

“Oh, that. Do you know Hafbrid?”

“Yeah. What does he have to do with this?”

“Well, you must be knowing Silch then?”

*Idiot girl. Never mind. Can't expect better from a Fishmartian.*

"So, he delivers those letters! I haven't met him in person but as per Hafbrid's description and from what I have heard, he seems to BE THE kind of person. A person jealous enough for a hut—is LIABLE to mis-deliveries. I wonder who assigned him the duty."

"No. You didn't let me finish. It's his cat."

Jerry burst into laughter upon hearing the words. However, the eyeing from Germione and Wrong brought him back to his neutral state.

"So you mean that a cat delivers those letters?"

"Yes. Is there something wrong with that?"

"I don't know. Your letter didn't reach you. I wonder if this is wrong enough," Jerry replied sarcastically.

Germione decided to handle the situation, seeing the rising levels of sarcasm in Jerry's tone. "Anyone remembers having a class to attend?"

"But first I must find my letter. It is important. Bye roomie."

"Bye," Germione facepalmed. *Not so soon!*

"Hey Lunatic," started Wrong, before Lunatic could go anywhere. "Was it a typed letter?"

"What?"

"Was it typed or handwritten? Actually, I am expecting a letter as well and seeing your letter got mis-delivered I would hope to not lose mine," Wrong lied.

"I would gladly help you."

"No! I mean—you don't have to worry about finding it. I was checking on whether typed letters got lost more often than their handwritten counterparts. But it's fine if you don't know what type of letter yours was!"

"Is it the case?" Lunatic got surprised once again. "I think it would be a handwritten one. Why would we need a typewriter?" Saying those words, she left.

*Finally!*



—  
“Wait, what? Is she your roommate?” Jerry wondered, walking towards the classroom.

“Yes,” There was no use in denying the truth. Earlier confrontation was better. “So, I told you how I woke the day you didn’t attend the class. I woke up watching her. But now I won’t have to. I found out my watch. I wish I had known earlier that it was in my backpack. And I have noted some timings. Our classes start at 7 in the morning and end at 1 in the afternoon. The lunch occurs from 11 to 12. And yesterday evening, we arrived at your room at 6:15.”

“That means you left at 1 for detention. And the maximum a teacher can retain someone is till 7,” explained Wrong.

“More like detain.”

“Wait for a sec. How is that possible? It only ever strikes five on those clocks.”

“You add it up. I will teach you if you want to know. With some days of practice, you will be fine.”

“I will be grateful.”

“You don’t have to be,” Wrong blushed.

—  
The three took their seats and, upon seeing no teacher in the class, continued conversing.

“I remember once having looked at the clock. It was showing 5. But I am sure it wasn’t 5. It is never 5.”

“Who brought you to your room then?” asked Germione.

“I remember having asked the same question before,” Jerry replied.

“Then what? Are you still thinking about the letter?” Wrong asked in a hushed tone.

“I have thought about it from the moment I saw it, officially,” Germione clarified. “It might have been a prank as well.”

“It could be. But what is the fun in learning about 100 different types

of fishes.”

Jerry clapped happily as an idea formed in his mind. “What if I don’t attend any of the classes and just stay in my room?”

“All the day?” asked Wrong.

“Yeah. All the day.”

“You might get ill if you don’t go outside.”

“No. No. No. I am not saying that. I am asking—what happens if a child doesn’t attend classes but stays at Fishmarts? Goes outside. Does all sorts of his/her normal stuff. Just doesn’t attend classes.”

“Have a look class,” the shiny black-haired boy spoke. “Mr. Hotter is forming a plan. How was the retention, Mr. Hotter?” the same boy joked.

The class looked with profound disinterest, first at Jerry and then at the boy who had just spoken. However, not wanting to land in trouble, no one said anything.

“Better than ever,” Jerry spoke, shutting the other one’s mouth close. “I wonder if a shampoo really decides someone’s hair colour. I thought that genes did.”

Taco Machloy, having no answer to offer, remained shut.

*Jeans?* Taco pondered over Jerry’s remark the whole time.

—

“Why isn’t she coming?” asked Germione looking at her watch that displayed 7:56 AM. “The class is about to be over and Dugonahull—Mrs. Dugonahull is nowhere to be seen.”

It was the second time in the entire history of Fishmarts that any teacher had ever been late. This had been the only positive thing that Germione had found—until now.

“At least the teachers aren’t late,” Germione remembered passing the remark to Jerry some days ago. As of now, she was hoping for Jerry to not remember her having given such a comment.

Having nothing else to do, Jerry rose from his seat, came to the front,

surprising Wrong and Germione.

“Lunatic Allisgood seems to have lost a letter. More precisely, the letter never reached her. If anyone finds a letter addressed to her, kindly do the needful.”

Having completed the announcement, he returned to his seat, where he found other kids whispering something into each other's ears.

*They clearly have nothing else to do.*

A discussion so started lasted for the day.

## Names

The next class passed in a similar fashion—the subject teacher never arrived.

“This is odd. This hasn’t happened before,” announced somebody whom Jerry—busy scribbling something that happened to be a list, didn’t know:

1. Germione Danger (Day 1)
2. Wrong Easily (Day 1)
3. Kevil Topbottom (\*unknown actually)
4. Deserva Dugonahull (Day 1)
5. Rigorous Hafbrid (Day 1)

The list didn’t end here. It was a long list containing a lot more names and ended with the name:

- Taco Machloy (\*unknown as of now)

“What are you doing?” asked Wrong, looking suspiciously at Jerry’s list.

“It’s—uh—what?” Jerry dropped making the list, realising how similar to a madman he must have been looking.

“What were you busy doing?” Wrong repeated in the same tone.

“I was making a list of people I know.”

“And why would you do that?”

“So I don’t forget their names.”

“Nobody does that.”

“I might not be a nobody but I need to remember names.”

“That isn’t what he means,” joined Hermione.

*Transformer Alert: Names. Do they mean anything? I have always wanted to say something so far, to show that I am not someone who doesn’t have a name. It ‘s not like someone who doesn’t have a name, or who hasn’t ever spoken to a person, but who just wants to put on a turtleneck, or something like that. I don’t know what I am saying. I’m not a politician, but I am a businessman, I am the only one who is willing to pay the bills and tell my wife that I am not a politician.*

## The Conversation

**A**ren't you a mind reader?  
"I wouldn't say anything without a proof."  
It has to be a coincidence.  
"People love to call them coincidences but that's not the right term."

---

"Never saw ice transform to liquid water? Or liquid water to vapour?"  
How would you know that?  
"Is that what transformations is about?"  
"Isn't it?"

---

"They want more Marine Engineers?"  
"Marine Engineers? No one actually knows about them."  
How do you then?

---

"Anyone else left?"

All the players had left the class. The teacher asked again, looking specifically at him:

"No one then."

---

"It. is. called. mind reading," Jerry spoke impatiently, sweating too much.

"Mind reading? Or is it? But first, why are you sweating?"

"What happened, Jerry?"

"Why are they giving us that look?" Jerry asked, looking at his fellow classmates with his drowsy little eyes.

"Because that was too loud."

"What was too loud?"

"That it-is-called-mind-reading phrase," answered Hermione.

"Really?" Jerry had never meant it to be loud. But being alone most of the time, he struggled to differentiate between his thoughts and speech.

*Transformer Alert: Mind reading can't be real! What does reading mean to you? What is the point of reading this book?. How can reading have real meaning? Is reading real and true? The truth is that reading is no good for everyone. There's no real truth to this nonsense. No truth to the nonsense. No nonsense to truth. You're not the only one reading this book. The only one reading this book is Truth.*

"Were you day-dreaming?" Hermione joked.

"What is it?" inquired Wrong.

"It is when you dream, thinking that you are in sleep but actually aren't. That is to say, dreaming when you are 'physically' awake."

"How long was I asleep?"

"I don't really know because you had your eyes open all this time. But you did stop responding after some time to which I assumed you had got lost in your thoughts. Turns out it was dangerous than that!"

"Which class is it?"

"Cooty. Period 3."

"Wow! That's a long time!" Jerry said to himself.

"Let me guess. You failed to hear the announcement that we had to be out of the class in 10 minutes?" observed Hermione.

"Certainly. What was that about?"

"It was an announcement about an announcement that is to happen shortly."

"Really?" Jerry asked Hermione, and then turned towards Wrong.

“Wrong, you said that Lizards knew magic? What does magic allow you to do?”

“Um—” Wrong paused to think what to answer. Germione didn’t know an answer, so now he would have to provide one. “I guess Scrubbers was a magical animal because you said you could hear him speak. And also, because he had lived for long. Mrs. Boris and Silch’s stomach are connected magically. Mrs. Boris magically delivers letters. Mrs. Dugonahull is a Transformer. From your talks, I can infer that you haven’t seen people transform!”

“Transform?” Jerry wondered. “Transform into what? Liquid, Gas or what?”

“She doesn’t transform into something,” a boy answered.

Jerry was glad that the voice didn’t match Taco’s. He turned his left to see Kevil speaking.

“Kevil Topbottom,” Jerry mouthed. “Why is she called Transformer then?”

“Because she can transform an object into some other object.”

“Ooo,” Jerry had his Eureka moment right then and there. It wasn’t his first, however. Many had happened before. “So that’s why she is called a transformer. I’ll keep that in mind. That’s an interesting point.”

“Bet you didn’t know that before?” Machloy commented, from the back. Jerry had to turn around to give a reply.

“Yeah. Didn’t I just say that? Incomplete knowledge is indeed a dangerous thing,” Jerry replied back. That had been the first time Jerry was actively participating in a conversation with someone other than Wrong or Germione, or the twins—if they counted, except Forge—at Fishmarts.

“What is your problem, Hotter?” Taco questioned again.

“I could say the same for you,” Jerry smiled. “I was in the middle of conversation with someone else, if you ought to know. I ought to finish it first.”



—

Jerry turned to Kevil again. "Transform things like?"

"Like a lump of clay into a clock or to a mouse."

"Really? A working clock? A living mouse?"

"How could the transformed object be living if the lump of clay isn't?"  
*Aren't such people called Potters? Who names you? Who names these terms? Who DECIDED that Fishmarts was going to be the most illustrious name of all time?*

"Clay might not be living but it consists of thousands of millions of microorganisms that are living. They can't be seen with our eyes like so, but under powerful microscopes, they can be."

Kevil made an amused face. "I am still not buying your idea."

"Nor am I selling it," replied Jerry. "I am just stating a fact."

"That isn't what he means," joined Hermione. She would say it whenever she felt she was not being in a conversation that Jerry was in.

"You always say that," Jerry complained about her—Hermione couldn't agree less.

—

"Is that all what she does? Transform a lump of clay into some other figure?" Jerry asked Kevil.

"Once she turned some cotton and a light bulb into a rabbit," Henna Abort, a girl shorter than Hermione, had joined the chat now.

"And I guess it wasn't living either?"

"No. Guessed correctly."

"Art and Crafts," Jerry chuckled on facing Hermione. "That's what they mean by Transformation. I would say it was clever. Neat. But some naming conventions are still ridiculous."

"Hey Kevil, have you heard something about Mind Reading then? With all this magic being taught, let me guess, mind reading would have an equally weird name as well."

"Weird, huh? I wouldn't say that."

"No. Don't take it the wrong way. Hafbrid came to my home by 'separation'. There is someone out there who has got no name. He has got a name actually. A cheesy one, though. Converting a lump of moulding clay into some inanimate object, it has got a clever name too: 'transformation'. And then that person having no name has got some followers," Jerry stopped for a while to remember the term they were referred to with. Not having it in his head, he had to look upon his notebook for the same. "The Eaters, which I would say is quite an intuitive name. The dining room is called 'The Great Mall'. The room does resemble a mall, if you ask me. So, with all this pep talk done, tell me if mind reading is called something like 'Neural Illumination' or 'Occupancy' or something of those sorts."

"Right. Did Wrong tell you about it?" Kevil didn't seem amused with this long talk that Jerry had just given.

However, Jerry did look surprised. Was he right, or was Kevil simply teasing him for his long, boring lecture?

"No way it is called Neural Illumination? They never use such scientific terms."

"Occupancy, it is," replied Wrong. "I don't remember having said that word before."

"Because you haven't. Idiot! What? How is it even possible?" wondered Jerry, meanwhile.

## Bad News

**A**fter those long 10 minutes were finally over, Jerry and his classmates headed back to the Great Mall where the entire Fishmarts (Fishmarts—as in school) had gathered.

“I bet it has something to do with that Quit-Rage trash,” Jerry hissed.

“What are the odds?”

“That isn’t what I mean.”

Upon hearing this Germione burst into hushed laughter while Jerry watched her, amused. Wrong held a confused look at the two—whom he called friends—and wondered what they were talking about because things didn’t make sense to him. They never did.

After the room had gone silent, Rickaroll announced the sudden and untimely demise of Mr. Virrel—the world’s only OTTLF teacher and the now-gone head of Pigeonclaw. The children there, however, didn’t seem too grieved or surprised—as their teacher had always seemed a walking dead. Jerry had often heard the phrase ‘the living dead’ from student Fishmartians. However, it wasn’t until now that he understood what, or rather who they were referring to. With health and a personality like that, it was utterly natural on their part to have such an assumption. And lo, they turned out to be correct!

From Rickaroll’s speech about him, Jerry got to know that Mr. Virrel hadn’t even revolved 30 times around the Sun. Though Jerry didn’t like anyone here, he still felt sorry for Virrel to have passed away so young.

However, Jerry found it ironical that despite being an OTTLF teacher, Virrel suffered from fish-flu (Jerry heard from Rickaroll). Fish-flu had been the reason for Virrel's poor health.

If it hadn't been for Mr. Virrel, human beings would never have come across the word *viral*, a word that Fishmartians gave to the world to honour 'the living dead' for the first and the final time.

*Transformer Alert: Fish-flu was a non-curable substance, usually taken as a treatment for the illness. It also was the most widely used substance of the day in the United States. It can be used for the treatment of the many diseases that have characterized it. In fact, it WAS a disease. The patients would usually be put on the meds and taken out for medical treatment. They would typically be placed on an ice-slab, which was a bed, which was indeed an ice-slab. Almost everyone who was treated this way died.*

However, this wasn't the only terrible news to be announced by Rickaroll. Apparently, the previous night, the Eaters had also raided, created havoc, and caused destruction in the campus—proving once again how financially burdening it was for the school authorities to effectively complete an academic year at Fishmarts.

Dord Fortesnort and the Eaters had been estimated dead for quite a while. But last night, evidently, they proved them all wrong.

HE WAS BACK! THEY WERE BACK!

## Cancelled

**T**he news spread like wildfire, causing depression to any Fishmartian who heard it. On the other hand, Jerry imagined the worst-case scenario—just in case.

*Just how bad could they be?*

However, Fortesnort and the Eaters came as a blessing in disguise for Jerry. Jerry cheered—though forced to keep his emotions to himself—because, because of Dord and his followers, the Quit-Rage practice was over. For now, at least.

Also, Lunatic got her missing letter back the next day. Evidently, the cat had taken her note away to her residence because of its smell.

*Transformer Alert: The cat who had always said that cats were a bunch of dumb people, just can't believe what she was hearing. Someone had asked her if she thought cats were good people, and she said she wasn't sure about that. The cat's owner told her that he'd rather see her as a cat than a dog or the guy who had died on the road last night.*



V

## Going Downhill

*Remember kids, annoyance is the key.*





## A New Chapter

Up until now, Jerry had only heard about Fortesnort from Wrong and the Easily twins. According to them and the others he inquired from, Fortesnort seemed entirely troubled and a lazy soul. Attending the facts, Jerry had pictured him as a fat creature obtained from hippo-human cross. He imagined him having a thick deposition of fat on his skin, a stout tummy—and that thought in his mind only added to his eagerness to meet him. Having read about the ill-effects of obesity, he doubted whether Dord could survive any longer than Virrel, despite not knowing his age. Obesity happens to be the leading cause of death in America and the world. Not only that, obesity also increased the likelihood of other diseases contracting a person. Wanting to know how his childhood had been, Jerry had asked the kids and adults alike. However, no one could provide him info on his origins because:

1. His past happened to be too ‘unengaging’ for kids to know and remember.
2. His memories were ‘too dreadful to recollect’ for the adults.

This, however, didn’t stop Jerry from learning the know-hows of Dord’s origins. It was only now that he wished for having stayed longer at his talk with Rickaroll. While Wrong didn’t seem too eager to know

Dord's secrets or showed any interest in Jerry's hunts for viable clues, Hermione did. She followed Jerry, wherever he went—clueing for looks, like a shadow, and soon became his partner-in-solving-crimes. Which they only got to solve once.

Good for him, his fellow classmates now seemed more friendly and eager to talk to him. The last talk he gave—the one about microorganisms in the moulding clay—had only added to their curiosity to know about the world beyond Fishmarts.

—

With Quit-Rage practice cancelled for now, Jerry could focus on his plan of getting expelled from Fishmarts. One day, Taco accidentally got hold of Jerry's notebook upon which his plan to get dismissed had been elaborately laid out. Being always lost in his thoughts, Jerry only noticed this when Taco started reading some familiar words in front of the class.

“...remember annoyance is the key. All you have to do...” read Taco. No one actually seemed to be listening to him, except for his minions M1 and M2.

M1 and M2 were the only ones to support Taco in every cause, be it breaking and entering Rickaroll's office when no one seemed to be there, or puncturing their swimming tubes so that the kids would drown instead of swimming in the school's only pool, which, similar to the Great Mall—was multipurpose.

That was when the words banged Jerry's ears. There was something odd about them.

“Have you read them somewhere?” he had asked Hermione.

“What have I read somewhere?”

Then suddenly, Taco had stopped speaking, picked up chalk, and begun drawing a schematic on the class board.

“Oh snap!” Those were the last words that Hermione had heard from Jerry before he rushed to Taco, ready to beat him up if he refused to

return his book. The whole class, now out of their business, turned towards the two. Taco—trying to be clever—watching Jerry clear the board, rushed out of the classroom, grabbing the book with him.

“Taco Bells, STOP!” Jerry had yelled—rushing out after him—after registering and realising what had happened. Ignoring all his appeals, Taco seemed to run faster than ever. They had run on top of their lungs until they had been seen by Grape, who would have, otherwise, marched to their class from his office.

However, none of the two noticed his presence until he joined them.

“Stop running, you two,” Grape huffed. It wasn’t until Jerry had almost gotten hold of Taco that he had noticed Grape—almost. Acting fast, Jerry had yelled at Taco, “Stop Taco. You are causing discomfort to Mr. Grape,” trying to not cause a scene in front of a teacher.

Upon seeing Grape, Taco thought of a fantastic plan to trap Jerry. He stood there, handing out the notebook to Mr. Grape, which Jerry nabbed in time. And while Taco and Grape weren’t noticing, he neatly tore out the problem-causing page and hid it in his pocket.

“You two have caused a big trouble. 10 points from Glycerine...” Grape yelled, while Taco silently smirked. He knew how partial Grape was towards his house. He wouldn’t deduct too many points from his own house. Never.

*Jerry. Jerry. Jerry. What have you brought upon yourself? Muahaha.  
“...and 100 points from Underscore.”*

*Knew that. You aren’t the only one who can form plans, Hotter.*

“This sort of insincerity towards your studies can be a cause of big trouble. Retention Mr. Hotter. Mr. Machloy, reach your classroom before I do.”

However, Taco didn’t move—not even an inch.

“What? No. NO! It was Taco who caused all this trouble. He was stealing—”

“Refrain from talking back.”

"I am not a talkback service."

"Don't. And what is that?" Grape asked, noticing the notebook Jerry was holding.

"This is the same notebo—" But before Jerry could fully speak, Taco cut him off.

"Jerry has been planning something dangerous. It's all in that book."

Grape snatched the notebook from Jerry in front of Taco and turned pages here and there to find some evidence. But he couldn't find anything more than some scribbles—Jerry's class notes. What a terrible handwriting he had!

"Mr. Machloy and Mr. Hotter, off to class. At once," ordered Mr. Grape handing Jerry back his notebook.

While rushing back, Jerry heard Grape mutter the words, "I hate this place."

*Phewww! That was a narrow escape.*

## Doubts II

**I** don't think they have a microscope here."

"All we know, you could be lying," replied Kevil.

"If I somehow get a microscope, I will prove it to you that I am not lying," Jerry declared in front of the class. "It has a base and tube," and then he attempted to draw its sketch on the board as best as he could. Lucky for him, the two were the only humans, or any non-microscopic living beings in the class. "I am not sure if my drawing is great enough—"

"...Anyway, that is not the point for now," continued Jerry, remembering the strange letter that had been misdelivered to him. "Does the word 'prince' ring any bell?"

"Why are you asking me?" Kevil asked back. For Jerry, Kevil seemed to be the only Fishmartian to have some sense to form valid arguments.

"Twisted naming conventions. Remember?" Jerry said with a cheesy grin on his face.

"NO. I meant—why don't you ask Wrong?"

"Well," Jerry tried framing his response to not sound insulting, "He—let's just say that he is ignorant to these details."

—

"Prince is a term used to refer the male child in the family," replied Kevil suspiciously.

"So, any male child..." started Jerry.

"...Can be nicknamed 'Prince'. It's very common to find someone named blank-blank Prince in every house," Kevil completed.

"What about a female child then? Are they called 'Princess'?"

"No. It's not like that," Kevil spoke as if it was self-evident.

*Of course, nothing has to be obvious!*

"So, you are saying that there could be someone called 'The Little Prince' too?" Jerry wondered.

"It's blank-blank Prince. What you are saying is only blank Prince. Here, let me give an example..." Kevil stopped to think for a viable example.

After pausing for one solid minute, he continued, "...the Cute Little Prince. I just corrected the example that you gave."

"And... every male child has a nickname of the format: blank-blank Prince?"

"It depends on the parents. Sometimes people adopt these nicknames themselves."

"And do people—not from the family—know who has got which nickname?"

"It depends, as I said. It depends—if the person has made that name public. If he has—then yes, other people would know whose name is which."

*To be honest, you aren't adding anything new to me. Note to self, nothing is to be assumed obvious.*

"Thank you, Kevil. You are the first person here to have properly explained me something. People here—especially elders—are always brushing me off—even if I haven't done anything wrong," Jerry started it as a compliment, but it gradually morphed into a complaint.

"I don't know what to say, Jerry. No need to thank me. By the way, you are the first person ever to have thanked me."

*Please don't start again. I can't take it anymore.*

## Conscience

“Someday, may the law be with me, I am going to arrest this woman on criminal charges,” threatened Hermione. She had always wanted to become a police officer on growing up. “No offence Wrong and despite my belief that adding ‘no offence’ to a statement doesn’t reduce the impact of offence that it is to deliver, that woman is insane. Why do they HAVE such teachers here? That OTTLF teacher has got no replacement—the LnC one has no sense of judgement and the transformer—don’t let me get started on her—she just keeps on shouting threats at us even though we haven’t done anything. Out of all, I only found Cooty the best.”

This time again, as if it were a routine, Hermione was furious at the Vice-Headmistress to have scolded the two of them for ‘merely being present outside the Headmaster’s office’. In reality, the two of them had gone there to inquire about the school library because no student had been able enough to tell her the same.

“He is the best of us,” Wrong chose not to reply to her other comments. He knew he won’t be able to argue. His parents had also warned him not to get too engaged with that Hotter fellow and had threatened to disown him in case he went against them. Having seen previous examples, he didn’t want to be the fourth one.

—

Walking back to their rooms, Wrong could hear the sound of

their footsteps. In the past few days, he had avoided—as much as possible—talking with Jerry and Hermione, and therefore, had no one to talk to.

Not even his elder brothers. Because one of them was too philosophical to talk with, often reminding him of Jerry. The second one was—well—way too stupid and had gone off his mind, thinking of himself as the greatest prankster the world had ever seen—whereas to Wrong, he felt like a mentally retarded person. Being in Jerry's company had changed him in ways—he never knew existed before.

*The greater the risk, the greater is the reward.* Jerry had once said this before him. *Stupid Jerry, take these thoughts off me. My family will disown me as theirs did to them.*

“So, what do you say?” asked Hermione.

—

When he felt that he had been missing something for too long, he lifted up his head and looked at her when he noticed her looking back at him.

“Huh? What?” Wrong asked.

“Well, I have said a lot of things,” Hermione replied.

“I am sorry I wasn't paying attention.”

“That's fine,” replied Hermione, even though she felt like knocking his head off. There she was, explaining how a school wasn't a school without a library—and this boy here, ignoring whatever she had said—had made ALL her energy—ALL her screaming on top of her lungs, go waste.

When they reached Jerry's room, they found him sincerely sitting on his table, looking at a letter suspiciously.

*But they haven't done anything wrong. How stupid? Wrong doesn't even sound like a name. Who decided to name me that way?*

—

“Is something not right, Wrong?” cheered Jerry.



"No."

"...Wait. Why did you ask that?"

*Who taught you Occupancy? They were right. You are up to something. I don't understand. Aagh. Why is everyone up to something?*

When Jerry didn't answer, he grew impatient. "Who. Taught. You. Occupancy?"

"Why would you think—with all the Fishmarts against me—will someone teach me Occupancy?"

*I think I got my answer. A simple trick from psychology, Grape is no mind reader. I was overthinking. Jerry thought. Sheer coincidence.*

*He has got a point. With everyone against him, who would teach him Occupancy. I am an idiot for doubting him.*

"...Body language tells a lot about a person. In a similar fashion—"

"Yes, Jerry. You can stop showing off," Hermione taunted. "Looks like you have got something. I have got something too."

Jerry clapped happily. "Yes, I have. You know what—have a look yourselves."

He handed her the sheet of paper he had been holding for half-an-hour. Having appearance similar to the previously received one, it was the second of those misdelivered letters:

"Hope this one reaches you, for the least. We should bring him a better cat. If this one remains undelivered as well, it's time for a change of plans. Would tonight be a great idea? Non-delivery of letters isn't a thing to be not taken seriously."

"If I have to be a detective, I would say someone's playing foul," Hermione concluded. "It's what I have read in the books."

"You forgot to have look at its back," Jerry reminded.

"The 33-Teethed Prince," read Hermione from the backside of the letter. "I don't think that I should but—" and before finished her sentence, she started giggling uncontrollably.

*Transformer Alert: Letters, be it alphabets or messages, or anything else,*

*is a common form of spamming. When used in conjunction with a social network, you might find it easier to spam your friends or your other users than people you never knew existed. Spamming has been in existence from times immemorial. However, spamming post-box! No one would have ever given it a thought. That would have to be said, I know! I know! But I don't know what it is. A fake spam. Be vegetarian, avoid eating ham!*

"Who wrote this letter? And where are all these Princes coming from?" she questioned but paused to laugh again. Jerry joined her too.

Wrong still didn't.

## Memories

“What happened Wrong?” Jerry inquired. “Has there been some problem lately?”

Wrong didn’t know what to say or tell them. His guilt was eating him from inside. However, he didn’t want to upset his parents either.

“I hope you will forgive me for any harsh words that I speak here,” he finally spoke. “I am in a dilemma and I have no idea what to do. I don’t even know why I am telling you this but I hope we all will feel relieved after the truth is out. I don’t see any reason why I shouldn’t.”

“I don’t understand,” started Germione. “If you don’t feel comfortable in telling us, you don’t have to. It should be your choice whether to share your thoughts or not. You shouldn’t be compelled based on other’s actions.”

“Not telling you the truth is making me feel guilty and if I don’t let the truth out, Jerry would never get to know the truth. Or so I guess. No one here seems to ease out his issues.”

“Hey, what are you talking about?” complained Germione.

“I am not going to talk about the minority of people that help him.” Hearing this Germione felt relieved. “I am about to talk about the reason why kids seem to maintain a distance from him.”

“...with my rat gone, I have got no one to talk to. He was my best friend. That day, before that idiot cat ate him up, Jerry complained of

having heard voices from the rat. It was a rat that could talk. He was a special rat." Hermione didn't like the direction this conversation was heading over to. She looked over to Jerry, who made a face meaning he didn't understand a word that Wrong had said. Neither did she. But both chose to comply and remained quiet.

"His voice could only be heard by those whom he deemed worthy. My brothers would always tease me, saying that I was just hearing things—whenever I mentioned our talking rat. That day when Jerry told us that he heard his voice, I knew he had chosen him. Chosen him over me. I felt envious. Alas! None of us could save him."

He paused to look at Jerry and Hermione, who looked like they were listening to him. And actually were. Even though the story seemed ridiculous, there was no harm in bringing comfort to a troubled soul.

"Jerry, you still remember the day you asked me about Shack?"

"Shack?" Jerry questioned, trying to remember where he had heard the word. "Radioshack?"

"Arcturus Shack, Jerry. The T.T.E. you talked with at the Tic-Tac-Toe Railway station."

"OH Yes! I remember. How could I forget his name?"

"You just did."

"You said that he knew your name even though you didn't tell him."

"Actually, I told him some false name and then he said my real name. That creeped me out. And before Dugonahull could come out of somewhere, he went away, leaving me alone."

"Of course, he would. He was your parents' friend."

"You have told me before."

"But have I told you that your parents had a group of four? Two of those were your parents and out of the other two, one was Arcturus Shack. I am sure that your parents had their reasons to not tell you about Fishmarts. Do you know why?"

"Because nothing practical is ever taught here," Jerry repeated, vaguely

remembering the conversation he had accidentally eavesdropped on.

“That’s what they said here too. That’s why they argued with the then headmaster—Callbus Rickaroll—he still is. That’s why they revolted. That’s why they came to hate this place. That’s why they never told you about Fishmarts. That’s why you grew to hate this place. And then fate had it—you were selected for Fishmarts. Have you ever wondered why your parents left you at your relatives, without a valid reason?”

“How do you know all of this?”

“My parents have studied with yours. Bet you didn’t know that?”

“No. I am not talking about that. I am asking how did you know where my parents left me,” Jerry was terribly freaking out now— like the time he had from the T.T.E.—to a lesser extent though.

“My father is the only Secretary to the Board of Directors of the only Ministry at Fishmarts—Ministry of Academic Research.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Jerry asked with a bitter expression.

“You might not like this—but the Ministry is responsible for selecting freshmen for Fishmarts.”

## Upside Down

Jerry couldn't believe the words that were leaving his fellow classmate's mouth—a person whom he had assumed to be a friend. “Why are you telling me this?” queried Jerry. “Now I mean.”

“I wasn't ready before.”

“Aww. How long I had waited to hear a reason for something of the sort? Thanks to Wrong I now know it. But I still don't understand why everyone hates them for a stupid revolt.”

But before Wrong could have answered any further, there was a loud bang on the door.

“I know you are inside, boy. You have landed yourself in a big trouble. Open the door,” roared Rickaroll.

“What is seriously wrong with this man?” breathed Jerry. “I haven't done anything worth the trouble,” he yelled and stomped towards the door.

The knockings only grew louder, and even before Jerry could have answered the door, it shattered into two.

Jerry first grew angry but then calmed down, remembering that:

1. Arguments with Idiots weren't worth his time and energy.
2. Rickaroll will now have to repair the door as well, on school expenses.

However, he did hand-gestured demanding why his door had met such a terrible fate. But in a blink of an eye—before he could defend himself—Rickaroll had lunged towards Jerry, held him by his collar and pinned him to the wall.

“Now, now,” the headmaster demanded. “What do we have here?” He asked, staring at Wrong. “I had expected better from you, boy. Don’t tell me that you have fallen for his friendship. You are such a disgrace to your family.”

“HE IS NOT!” Jerry yelled back, intensely annoyed at the insult of his friend. Rickaroll hadn’t come alone. He had brought Dugonahull, Cooty and Grudge—the Minister of only Ministry that Fishmarts had—with him.

“Don’t. Talk. To me like that,” he hissed, and suddenly Jerry could feel the impact of his hand on his face. Prior, no one had ever insulted him in this manner. No one had annoyed him like that. EVER. No one had ever violated him like that. He wanted to cry, but he couldn’t. He wanted to kill the man present in front of him, but he couldn’t. He wanted his parents to be with him, but they weren’t. All because of one reason. FISHMARTS.

Germione and Wrong flinched at the sound of Rickaroll’s palm hitting Jerry’s face.

The old Fishmartian then turned towards the children and announced, “There is no such thing as SCIENCE.”

Jerry tried his best to hide the humiliation but couldn’t. Before fainting, he straightened up, still being held up by his collar and looked at his opponent in his eyes where he saw something strange.

## Companion

**I** *t is just like kidnapping. Now that I think about it, IT JUST IS KIDNAPPING.*

“NOO. IT’S NOT,” Jerry struggled to scream, apparently feeling that something heavy was preventing him from standing up. “THIS IS MUCH WORSE.”

“Calm down, Jerry. Calm down,” came a familiar-sounding voice. Jerry looked around to find himself lying in a bed that wasn’t his. He struggled to straighten up, still panicked from the incident, while the person came forward to help him.

“You need to relax. Panic attacks can get much worse,” the person gagged.

The white light around him felt much stronger than it really was which forced Jerry to keep his eyes shut for a little longer than he—otherwise—would have. The room was dark otherwise. He inhaled heavily, initially having difficulties in doing so, and spoke only after having calmed down.

“You aren’t who you say you are.”

“I don’t think I understand you,” the person replied.

“You couldn’t have possibly known about the states of matter. People here are questioning the existence of Science.”

“Those words aren’t uncommon to use,” Mr. Grape smiled. The mystery man was none other than Mr. Grape! What a surprise!



“But you aren’t the one who you appear to be. Who are you really?”

“Is that supposed to mean that I am not a human?” Grape chuckled.

“This place is for complete idiots,” the words came out more fiercely and spontaneously than Jerry had intended them to. “Therefore, the question is: what are you doing here? Also, if you really belonged to this place, you would have called yourself a Lizard, not a human.”

“But aren’t lizards supposed to be reptiles?”

“That is what I have been saying my whole life!” Jerry’s voice cracked at this point. He couldn’t contain his tears anymore. “But then twisted naming conventions change everything.”

Jerry was now sobbing uncontrollably. The words only came out of his mouth in between breathes.

“What am I doing here?” Jerry asked, wiping his tears off. He wasn’t trusting this man now, for all he knew, he could have been a terrorist or some maniac whom the idiot Headmaster had sent to kill him.

“Easing out,” the LnC teacher replied calmer than ever.

“Are you Dord then?”

“Dord who?”

“It’s not a knock-knock joke,” Jerry’s anger was getting out of control with each passing minute. How he wished his parents were here. “Dord Fortesnort.”

“Why would you think that?” the teacher replied in an equally soothing voice. “Do I look obese? Do I look like a person who—leave that. Never mind. I never said that.”

“That is not the point,” Jerry calmed himself down. “The point is, that you are not the person who you show you are. You know things beyond any Fishmartian would ever know. You knew what a Marine Engineer does while other people here struggle to guess what a microscope might be.”

“Fishmartian,” the LnC teacher laughed. “So that’s what you call the residents. And would your definition, classify me as a Fishmartian too?”

Jerry didn't know what to say. Was it safe, conversing with a person standing so close—a person whose real identity was unknown to any Fishmartian?

"Does that mean no?" the person repeated softly.

"Stay away from me," Jerry cautioned. "Who has sent you?"

"Fine," replied Mr. Grape. "I will do what you say," he teased Jerry. "I will stay away. I will stay away from you like the other Fishmartians do."

Hearing the word 'Fishmartian' from a person who wasn't his family or an acquaintance didn't feel right. That word had meant to be a code-word (even though he didn't know it for a fact—he sometimes felt that it just was), and Jerry had now blurted it out to a person with motives unknown.

"Who. Has. Sent. You?" Jerry asked, with a lowered voice, this time. If he was going to be killed by this person, he had to save some energy for the upcoming battle. He wasn't going to give up without a fight.

When the opponent didn't reply, Jerry grew uneasy. Sure, he was going to be murdered right then and there—a place where no one would come to check.

Where was this place anyway? He had wondered about it the whole time, but his mind never provided an answer. How would it? He had never been here before.

And then he would die without having bragged 1st position in Grade 9. And then he would die without making his parents feel proud. And then he would die, letting his parents down.

Parents...

"No. I won't," he retaliated, answering his thoughts.

"I am not going to give up without a fight," Jerry declared.

"Woah. Fight?" Beverous Grape exclaimed. "Calm down Junior! Not everyone is a terrorist. Neither was Arcturus Shack—"

"H—how do you know all of this?" Jerry interjected, reconsidering

the fact that his teacher might be a mind reader, even though he had rejected the idea a few days earlier.

“Your parents did whatever they could but I don’t think it wise to keep you in dark any longer,” Grape had grown momentous. “This meeting, however, should be kept a secret from anyone...”

“...especially whom you call Fishmartians,” he laughed to his heart. “Oh Jerry! I don’t understand. That was meant to be kept a secret.”



# VI

## A Fresh Start

*He had some other name before all this 'the Eaters' business started.*



## Extension is Inevitable

“Good heavens,” Taco hailed. “An enemy of an enemy is back.” Jerry was surprised upon seeing some unwanted guests in his room. *What are all of these doing here?* Since the last night, he hadn’t been in his room, making Germione and Wrong extremely worried, though any of the adult Fishmartians had been not. The Fishmartians never gave a second thought about his health status or safety or where he had been. No one cared for him there, except for a few good souls, which had spiked in number because of the incident from last evening.

“How are you now but importantly, where have you been?” Germione rushed to embrace him.

But instead of providing an answer, Jerry questioned her back, “What are they doing here?”

He hated the presence of unwanted beings in his room—creatures like Kevil, M1 and M2 and most importantly, Taco Machloy. M1 and M2 complemented each other’s personalities. M1 was thin as a stick, while M2 looked like a descendant of Dord Fortesnort (as per his description Jerry had heard), fat and stout, unable to even walk properly.

“Let’s just say that the Solden Trio is getting a raise in terms of number of members,” Taco replied.

“Wait a minute—the what trio?” Germione puzzled. “You didn’t tell us about that before.”

"Yeah," Kevil said nervously. "That's what they call the three of you."

"Is that the case?" Germione asked sassily. "Then what do they call you and your these... friends of yours."

"I think you are getting it wrong," Taco defended. "They aren't my friends. They are my minions. There is a difference between the two. Besides, that is not the point of this talk. My point is we want to join the Solden Trio after what happened yesterday."

"Yours explained, what is Kevil doing here then?" Jerry demanded. "Does he want to join it too?"

"Yeah," Kevil answered, fiddling with his hands, not sure where to put them. A meeting began as everyone took their seats: Jerry on his table, Germione on Jerry's chair, Taco and his minions on Jerry's bed, Kevil on Jerry's upside-down bucket and Wrong—he stood still.

—

"How do you know this?" Germione wanted to know.

"His father—well, better for him to explain himself," Wrong said.

"The thing is—" Taco started, unsure of whether he should reveal the info. A realisation came to him that since Lizards already had an idea of what he was going to talk about, it wasn't going to cause any harm to tell Jerry the same.

"You don't necessarily have to tell us," comforted Germione. "It is absolutely fine if you don't want to." The phrase always did the trick. It never failed to work.

"Okay. Point #1. I hate Rickaroll. He thinks too much of himself. I want to prove him that he is nothing more than a piece of trash."

"Is that what your plan is?" Wrong asked. He had thought that Taco was going to say something else.

"You didn't let me finish. Point #2. I hate all this 'the Eaters' business. I AM capable of paying for my food."

"...or will be one day, when I get a job," he added. "I want to avoid my father making me an Eater like him. I don't want to get fat like that



he-who-has-got-no-name. Nor do I find this idea of making periodic raids on the school campus any funny.”

“The man has got a name, Taco,” Jerry mumbled. “Dord.”

“I know him better than you do,” Taco contested. “Did you know that previously he had some other name, before all this ‘the Eaters’ business started?”

“You know, I would have,” Jerry internally cursed Hafbrid for no particular reason. He had meant to curse Rickaroll or his wife, the Vice-Headmistress, but it didn’t matter. Some talks later, he would curse them as well. He decided. “Had some people told me about it, beforehand.”

Wrong replied back, assuming that that the comment was meant for him.

“I was wrong then. But yesterday has changed me,” he bellowed.

“I wasn’t talking about you, Wrong. Anyways, Taco was about to tell his other name. Taco, you are in.”

“Food Trr Rodents,” the-silent-till-now Kevil spoke and immediately everyone turned in his direction.

—

“What on Earth is that?” Jerry asked.

“That was what Taco was about to tell you.”

Everyone remained silent for a moment—Jerry and Hermione to think whether to laugh to not, and the rest of the members—to pay tribute to all the food the Eaters had ever consumed.

## Dord Fortesnort: The Origins

**Y**our parents are Eaters too?" Jerry couldn't hide his curiosity. "So many secrets. Aaagh," he groaned. "Wait for a second, I have to bring my notebook."

"NO," Kevil emphasised. "Why would you say that?"

However, Jerry seemed not to listen to him—busy finding his notebook, which had gotten misplaced after the last evening's raid.

"What did they do to my notebook!?" Jerry grew worried, not finding his notebook at its usual location. "That idiot old man—" but he stopped as soon as he saw a shiny object, creating a reflection from below-his-bed. He pulled it in an embrace as soon as he realised that the crackpot had thrown his notebook randomly like a piece of trash. "—MY NOTEBOOK!" His expression had been so intense that even Taco crazed out. "Whoever was speaking can continue."

"So I was saying— where was I?" Topbottom asked, having lost track of his progress.

"Listen to me," Taco began. "We are just wasting time. His parents are not Eaters. Mine aren't either, except for my father. So, as Topbottom has already spoiled for you—"

"No, I haven't."

"—Doesn't matter. He-who-has-got—"

"Dord!" cautioned Jerry.

"He-who-has—" Taco started again, refraining from saying his actual

name.

“His name is DORD FORTESNORT. DON’T YOU SEE! A rose by any other name is still a rose! Rickaroll avoids saying his name as well. If you are going to follow HIS philosophy, you will never be capable of forming your own!”

“He’s right,” joined Germione. Germione had always been the one to join.

“Fine. Dord then. When he was a child, I mean, when he wasn’t as aged as he is now—”

“Wait a second—how do you know this? He isn’t a child anymore. Is he?” reasoned Jerry.

“Jerry, don’t you see,” mocked Taco. “Seriously? You can ask Wrong if you think he can be more truthful than me,” Taco said, turning towards Wrong. “Or Topbottom. Or anyone else. Though I think you should stick to your friends because the adults won’t consider even you.”

“Hey!” Jerry protested but then agreed with Taco. “Continue.”

“Fishmarts School of Fishcraft and Fishery is the only school in Fishmarts. And I have known, because of my parents or ask anyone else, when he—who—Dord was a child, he attended this school too.”

“What was his name again?” Jerry interrupted, clutching a pencil, prepared to jot down important facts. “Dord’s original name?”

“Food Trr Rodents.”

“Food as in the eatable content?”

“Yes.”

“After that. No, this is time consuming. Can you spell it out?”

“F-O-O-D space T-R-R space R-O-D-E-N-T-S.”

“This is the most ridiculous name I’ve ever head,” Germione commented.

“Speaking of names, do you know Germione—later. Continue Taco.”

“You made me forget where I was, Jerry,” complained the Baby Machloy.

—

After an hour of obtaining facts about Dord's childhood, the group decided to rest for some time. The two non-Fishmartians got to know how Dord's nose had got missing due to his habit of periodically blowing it out. This and the fact that he had become obese because of his only hobby—eating food—somehow didn't make sense to any of the two. Jerry wondered how could Dord still be alive without a nose or—if he still was—how was he still not dead due to a heart attack or any of the other countless side-effects of obesity.

"I don't think he is alive," asserted Jerry. "Obesity is not something to be joked about."

"He did come to your naming ceremony. Don't you remember?" Kevil asked.

"How would I remember someone who I haven't seen in my whole life? And that too must have happened 9 or 10 years ago. 10 years is a long period. He could be dead—if he wasn't then."

"Then how would you explain the recent raid by the Eaters?" This time it was Taco.

Germione, who had been busy with Jerry's notes all this time, finally spoke up, "I have got something interesting here. Dord's initial and final names are anagrams."

Jerry laughed at Hermione's point. "Is that what you have been doing since then? I figured it out as soon as Taco spelled out Food Trr Rodents."

"Anagrams?" Taco, Kevil and Wrong asked simultaneously. Jerry looked at Hermione, asking her to explain, but instead got a reply to his previous remark.

"If that was the case why didn't you tell us then? I wasted all my time over this," Hermione made a face.

"I didn't think it was that big of a deal," Jerry argued back.

"What is anagrams?" Kevil repeated.

"Anagrams is the plural form of anagram. Anagram is like, when you

arrange a word or a phrase to form another word or a phrase,” Jerry explained. “Take a word, say DOG. You can rearrange the alphabets of the word DOG to form GOD. Therefore, DOG and GOD would be anagrams.”

“So, that makes Food Trr Rodents an anagram of Dord Fortesnort. Am I saying it correctly?” asked Machloy.

“Yeah. If you aren’t sure about yourself, you can count the number of times each alphabet occurs in both of the phrases, or as many phrases as you wish to compare. If an alphabet occurs the same number of times in each phrase, then those are anagrams—I hope we all know what I mean by alphabets—”

“If that re-arrangement thing that you are talking about is true, he was right the day he said.”

“Who was right?” asked Wrong. He had no clue of what Taco had just said. Neither had Topbottom.

“He-who—Dord. My father told me that,” Taco was leaking out an essential Eater-exclusive fact. “Though he never used the word anagram or such. But like you said, Jerry, he once told me why Dord started it all.”

It had all started one fateful day when Dord got of legal age. Dord had never liked his original name because of the teasing he received from all his friends. This teasing only grew in magnitude as his age did. So Dord vowed to get a new name as soon as he got of legal age (this has been the requirement to change your name at Fishmarts). But as the saying goes, changing your name doesn’t change your habits. Rodents, focussing only on eating food, never got the time to work on his intelligence. Evidently, he used a dictionary to obtain his new name: Dord Fortesnort—the same dictionary had contained a lexicographical error. Had he been from Jerry’s world, he would have been praised to give the idea of anagrams to this world, the first one being his new name. Alas, that wasn’t the case, and Fishmarts had never been the place

to respect creativity and rationality.

## Ridiculous

“Can someone explain me why each new story keeps on getting exponentially more ridiculous than the previous one?” Jerry complained. “Wrong’s rat could speak, Silch and his cat are wirelessly connected, Hafbrid cried wolves off his eyes and—and later on—because that wasn’t enough—he took them back too. What kind of place is this? And now, from nowhere, this Dord being changes his name, eats off someone else’s plates. Not only that,” Jerry was getting crazy now, “he can still breathe even though he DOESN’T HAVE A NOSE.”

“Fishes don’t have a nose,” Kevil answered.

“Wrong has a speaking rat?” a surprised Taco asked. M1 and M2 had been sitting dumb, been there only to accompany Taco.

“Dord is a fish then?” Jerry asked seriously, and suddenly burst into tears of joy. “Goodness. Any other fact that is remaining to be listened to?”

—

“Wrong HAD a rat,” corrected Germione. “Jerry and Wrong claimed that he could talk. But now the topic is no longer worth the argument as he’s dead.”

Hearing about his dead pet AGAIN filled Wrong’s eyes with tears.

“See, we shouldn’t have brought the topic,” she warned, seeing Wrong cry.

"I wasn't the one to bring it," rebelled Taco.

"Who was it then?"

"Jerry," answered Kevil, and they all stared at Jerry for a good five minutes.

*Transformer Alert: Having a wireless connection is always considered to be a good choice. If you need a wired connection you need to connect it directly to your wireless connection and a wired connection is always considered to be a good choice. Even better than the wireless one.*



## Our Pasts Revealed

**T**he fourth week of the month was to end but none of Jerry's plans to get off the rolls had been successful. Dugonahull was still Dugonahull. Rickaroll had still been the same—grumpy old man. The only person to have a noticeable behaviour change had been Cooty. Not being able to find Virrel's replacement, the Headmaster had assigned him to be the substitute. Perhaps, that was the reason for his changed behaviour.

*Anyone who refused to offer them food would get killed or worse, expelled from Fishmarts. Taco's words were ringing loudly inside Jerry's head.*

*Jerry, with the widespread use of the internet, ever wondered where the word 'memes' derives its roots from?*

*Why this sudden change in topic, Mr. Grape?*

*Memes Groupin, the person responsible for originating the concept of the internet, disappeared from this world on this very day, ten years ago. They never found him. He's missing to this day.*

Memes Groupin—a friend of Jerry's parents and a member of the group popular at Fishmarts by the name The Dumb Charades—had been the one responsible for giving the idea of the internet to the world. Being disowned by his family for following Thames's ideas of practicality, it wasn't easy for him to become a Computer Scientist. And later, he even won many laureates for his country—proving his actual potential.

Like him, Arcturus Shack—the T.T.E. whom Jerry had met while his

search for Platform Two and the Unnamed Fifths, too was disowned, at that time by his family for going against the ideals of Fishmarts by following *Jerry's parents' ideas of practicality* during their stay at Fishmarts.

Similar to Jerry's sidekicks—Wrong and Germione, his father, Thames had his share of sidekicks too—Arcturus being one of them, Memes being the other. Liliium had always been the protagonist—along with Thames. Being from a Lizard family, Shack and his friend—Groupin were deeply influenced by Thames's ideas of practicality. Liliium and Thames had shown them how interesting Science could be, and thus a group was formed. Together, the four were called **The Dumb Charaders** by the rest, in order to shame them and drive them away from Science. But those Fishmartians never stood a chance against the group.

Had it not been for Grape, Jerry would have never got to know about the origins of the people who had made the greatest contribution in his life.

Interesting fellow Grape...

*We lost a friend that day, the world lost a scientist.*

Jerry uneasily shifted his thoughts to focus upon something less dark, like something funny that Wrong had shared with him.

*Mrs. Dugonahull has been a teacher before your parents came here.*

"Intelligence doesn't always come with age," Jerry commented absent-mindedly, not realising how long he had been staring Cooty like a creep.

## The Unrememberable Curses

“What is it, Jerry?” Mad Brain Cooty asked Jerry, annoyed for getting interrupted in between his lecture. Removing his cool-looking black spectacles, he put them back after cleaning the dirt off them.

“N—nothing, sir,” he said, stammering—surprised at what he had seen.

“Don’t interrupt me again then,” huffed Cooty. “The Unrememberable Curses, as I was saying. Everyone, EXTRA attention on the board—what we are going to learn today, is by far the most complex concept that you are ever going to learn.”

Once distracted by Jerry’s remark, the class tuned their attention to the class board, upon which the three unrememberable curses were written.

#1: Exopoliate

#2: Scathax

#3: Dipthermally

“Unrememberable curses, students. No one has ever been able to remember them. Nor will anyone be able to,” explained Cooty. “They are read from a special book that has them penned down.”

*Transformer Alert: Their classroom was set up for the students by their family, but instead of having to teach at all, the students got to know each other so that they could share more, and to talk about their own struggles with*

*this school. It felt like an easy thing, because it was like having a really nice time together. The students were a lot more open, and the teacher kept telling them things like, "What is it like to be a turtle of a cat?" or, "How much do you want to eat?" and so on. You knew that the turtle would come with a huge amount of food and that wouldn't be okay for him because some people will eat him up.*

These happened to be the same curses that messengers from Fishmarts were infected with. Alone—none of the curses worked. But their combination created a perfect, deadly weapon—a person cursed in such a manner that if ignored, would bring bad luck to one's family and relatives. Fishmarts had always been weird in a sense.

While everyone else settled down for the homework, a curious person raised his hand. It wasn't Jerry, or Germione.

It was M1. In case he spoke, it would be Jerry's or Germione's first time to hear him speak. Minions weren't supposed to speak when their leader was in their visibility range. And so, they rarely did.

"What are they used for?" asked M1. Jerry had never heard a voice so deep—though he was able to make out what M1 had said.

"You aren't going to use them in any case. They are reserved for use of a few members from the Ministry."

"What is the point of learning them if they aren't practical?"

*Mission Accomplished.* Jerry could imagine himself smiling, feeling fulfilled. *Sub-mission, actually. Or Inter-mission. Whatever it is.*

Cooty stood in silence, devoid of any reason to provide.

## Jolly Foul Play

Stuffing the previously received letters into the zip-able pocket of his favourite trousers, Jerry hurried to Taco's room where the group members had promised to meet. They could raid Jerry's room anytime but they would never do the same to Taco. No Fishmartian would ever suspect an Eater's child to stand up against the Eaters themselves. *The Solden Trio plus Four's* plan was fail-safe.

Upon his reaching there, however, Jerry had to wait for Hermione and Kevil to come. They weren't too quick to arrive unlike the others.

—

"Is that why you were asking me about those Princes that day?" Kevil questioned.

"Better safe than sorry."

"But it could be anyone. Just saying, Jerry, but even you can have a name of that format."

"But I don't think people here think too deeply before adopting one. Self-portrait. These names are all self-portraits. Three weeks is an ample amount of time, especially—sorry, I got drifted away."

"Likewise, these could have been pranks too," Hermione argued as she often did. "You aren't considering all the possibilities. It doesn't describe anything dangerous." She then began reading those letters, "Let me read it again. We were successful."

Having read the first one, she slid it below the second, "The second

one reads: Hope this one reaches you, for the least. We should bring him a better cat. If this one remains undelivered as well, it's time for a change of plans. Would tonight be a great idea? Non-delivery of letters isn't a thing to be not taken seriously..."

"...It is natural to be worried about non-delivery of your important papers. Better cat, I assume someone referring to Mrs. Boris. I don't expect them to use some secret sign language, as you said three weeks is enough to observe and conclude patterns. There is nothing wrong with organising meetings. We are having one right now—"

"I don't think you get the point," Jerry began. "The circumstances are suspicious. One day, a letter arrives at our doorstep declaring that someone has been successful at something and we are announced—the next day—the raid by the Eaters. If the letter was so important, why did no one come around to ask for a lost one? When Lunatic lost hers, she did ask around, in case anyone had got hers. Why? Because. She. Had. Nothing to hide. Someone is not playing fair."

"I don't think you got mine. I had thought about it the same way initially, but now I have enough evidence to prove that the letter was a prank. Why would anyone care so seriously about a prank note? There is no one named like... what was that," Ready to burst anytime, she struggled to read the letter's recipient. "—the 33-Teethed Prince. Oh my! Who names their child like that?"

"Who names their child Callbus?" Jerry countered. "Who names their Hafbrid? I have a long list but don't want to go on. Then where do these names come from?"

"You two had enough arguments," Taco broke their ongoing conversation. "Upon considering Jerry's point, I do remember someone talking about somebody having 33 teeth. It was the someone from Ministry, as far as I remember."

"But my father doesn't have 33 teeth," Wrong defended.

"Not everything is about your father, Easily. I think—I heard your

brothers making a joke about it,” Taco re-collected his thoughts, just to be sure. “I... think, yeah, I must have heard your brothers. They were talking about a Ministry official having 33 teeth.”

“Germione,” Jerry started at once, with his face serious this time. Jerry only held a serious face when talking about something important or when he was rebelling. “I don’t think it was a prank. I don’t think students are given access to a typewriter. How could we forget this point?”

Germione remained silent. Jerry had a fair point. Kevil further confirmed that the typewriter was used for official purposes only. It wasn’t a daily household thing.

*Thanks Kevil! Wrong, you are great, but you got to learn more.*

“Where are you headed to?” asked Wrong as he saw Jerry slipping outside without getting noticed. At his saying, everyone turned to Jerry—demanding an explanation.

“These nicknames are a self-portrait!”

## Ulterior Motives

“Is he always like that?” Taco asked, despite having a feeling that he knew the answer.

“True to my knowledge,” answered Hermione.

“What do you think this is about?”

“I don’t know. I thought that someone was playing tricks on him. He has got enemies, you know...” Hermione signalled, not wanting to speak further.

“You think it was me?” Taco snapped. “You think I WAS sending those letters?”

“I didn’t say that. I never said that.”

“Don’t fight,” Wrong calmed the two down. “As far as I have heard, the Eaters only take the food away— Taco, have you seen how Dord looks like?”

“My father being an Eater doesn’t make me an Eater,” Taco argued.

While the three were busy arguing, Topbottom was forming a theory based on what he had heard from Jerry. Jerry’s hypothesis could have been all wrong, but it never hurt to try once and fail. “Taco, don’t take it personally—but how DO the Eaters decide upon a meeting?”

“I don’t know. I have zero idea. Not being interested in the business, I never gave it a thought. Why? What just happened to you?”

*Transformer Alert: The Eaters was a name given to a special group of people who had been following the Earth for some time, the last time there*



*was ever an actual Earth for a period that they were still on. They were also the ones to be the Eaters.*

“Nothing. I could be wrong but—I think—if what you say is right then someone from the Ministry could be helping Eaters to achieve their motives.”

“But why would they need someone from the Ministry additionally, if what they all require is Dord?” Wrong’s brain-cells were working quickly this time. Germione suspiciously eyed him, grasping his body language. He didn’t seem to hide anything. Even if he were—he would have been the worst person In The History to have been asked to do so.

“Maybe, just maybe, they have changed their plans. Greed can’t be trusted. Greed is never a good thing.”

Hearing this from Germione made everyone turn towards Taco. Even his minions were now wearing the same look upon their faces—the expression that non-minions were currently boring.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Taco chuckled, nervously. “I told you,” he pleaded again. “That I have nothing to do with my father’s business. Promise. I haven’t met my parents for the same time, you haven’t met yours.”

“Letters?” remarked Kevil.

“Aagh,” Machloy groaned. “I thought I gave you my word. You can check my room if you please.”

“You could have burned them!”

“I swear I haven’t done any such thing,” Taco pleaded for his innocence.

## The Cross-Eyed Prince

**T**he next day, during morning assembly at the Great Mall (duh!) Callbus Rickaroll seemed fuming with rage for some not-so-apparent reason. The man had zero tolerance for any activity he disliked—the same had been the reason for the replacement of school bus-service with a truck one.

“Jerry Hotter!” howled the Headmaster. “Come out.”

Upon hearing his name, Jerry’s friends were more concerned—than him—about him. What had he done now? Had Cooty complained to the Headmaster regarding M1’s behaviour in his class? And was it Jerry’s fault that he had done that?

Things didn’t make sense. They were not meant to.

Not at Fishmarts.

Jerry nervously walked out of the crowd, towards Rickaroll praying to not get slapped again. Rickaroll—the last time—had charged at him for no particular reason. When he reached the front, Rickaroll handed him a sheet of paper and asked to read it silently. It read:

“The enemy of the Eaters, BEWARE!”

As Jerry was about to flip the note, Rickaroll snatched it away from him and asked, “Reminds you of something?”

“No, sir,” Jerry answered with a tone of uncertainty in his voice. “Should it remind me about something?”

“Nothing. You can walk away.”

—  
 “What was that about?” Hermione asked Jerry, about the incident from the morning, while they were headed upwards to their rooms.

Jerry looked around them to make sure no one else would be listening to him. The only people he wanted to talk to this time were—the Trio members.

“Well, I did what I told you. I proved that those nicknames were a silly choice for someone to hide their identity. Even a child would understand.”

“I don’t think I understood you,” Wrong briefed.

*Whoops! Remember to never speak too much too soon.*

“Neither am I sure that I got the correct meaning,” replied Hermione.

“Hey!” Kevil joined the trio from behind. “What was he mad about?” he asked, referring to their Headmaster. “In the morning.”

*I think I can trust him.*

“Well, the time he slapped me I noticed that his eyes were squinted. And I guess, that is the reason why he wears those black glasses and never takes them off. Whatever—now, having heard from you about those Prince nicknames, I decided to give it a shot. So I wrote a really stupid line regarding the enemies of the Eaters and added the Cross-Eyed Prince as the recipient, and asked our favourite delivery boy to have the mail sent. I hoped it to work, even though I do not, myself, approve of the idea. I doubted its working, but Mrs. Boris is indeed magical if you define *magical* a certain way. With the results in hand, I am sure that the 33-Teethed Prince is INDEED a person with 33 teeth and the One-Eyed Prince is a person with—as the name suggests—only one eye.”

“That wasn’t worth taking the risk,” Kevil responded, while Hermione warned that despite being brilliant, the idea had been foolish at the same time.

“The greater the risk, the greater is the reward,” Wrong answered

for Jerry, having heard the same from him sometime before, which he greatly appreciated.

"You are so dumb, Jerry," Germione scolded. "All you had to do was to send either of those teethead or eyed Prince a letter. You dragged Rickaroll in for no reason."

Jerry thought of her for a moment and realising that she was correct, "Will do better next time," he promised.

*Transformer Alert: Looking at anyone with your dog, or taking a look at a photo of her, we are not allowed to shoot your dog. Please don't shoot a photo of your dog. No matter how small you are, let it be a problem! Problems are solutions in disguise. If someone asks you to take a pill, please contact the dog owner or the dog. Avoid appreciating help from unknowns. Call them! Be grateful! Don't let the Eaters eat your dog. They won't.*

## Plus Five

“**A** lright—” came a voice from a room that looked just like Jerry’s—though far more illuminated.  
“May I come inside,” interrupted a feeble voice, knocking on the wooden door.

“Wrong!” Hermione said, irritated. “You don’t have to ask to come inside.” She was almost finished but started again as she noticed another figure standing beside him. “What IS Greg doing here?”

Everyone inside the room—too—was surprised as they noticed Greg with his younger brother. If it weren’t for Hermione’s statement, they wouldn’t have even cared to notice him.

“I—I—” faltered Wrong. “Remember, what you asked me to do? That’s why it happened.”

Jerry mentioned with an annoyed face, “Does he want to turn Plus Four into a Plus FIVE?”

“I can explain,” Greg said in a calm tone. “But before it, am I allowed to come inside?”

—

“Right then, you are,” Jerry energised. “THE fifth, no, sixth—”

“Eighth,” interrupted Hermione.

“—My bad,” continued Jerry. “I appoint you as the eighth member of the group. Happy now?”

—

"As I was saying, before a lot of interruptions came," Taco began, pointing to the population mess that had been filling his room for the past hour. "I was assigned to be the one writing to the Vice-Headmistress, M1 and M2 will be writing to the rest of the teachers."

This was their plan to prevent Jerry from being caught as his writing sample was already present with Rickaroll. However, Jerry wasn't so dumb. He had written the note with his right hand, being a leftie, making the process of matching those writings impossible.

Impossible? Fishmartians never thought of the edge cases!

"You need to be careful, Jerry," the older Easily advised. "Headmaster—"

"You have to stop worrying about me," Jerry said with a confident smile. "If someone has something to hide—we should wait till tomorrow morning to have an explanation."

Hearing Jerry's words, Germione looked at her watch—15: 09.

"Team—" Jerry lead.

"Yeah," all but Jerry replied, eagerly looking at him.

"—We have some Eaters to nab."

## Catch-32

Jerry had planned on killing two birds with a stone: (1) To catch the Eaters red-handed and make Fortesnort's life miserable, and (2) To implement his original escape plan. Though Fortesnort hadn't bullied or pestered him as Rickaroll had, he still had been the person responsible for scarring Jerry for his life—an oval-shaped scar on his forehead.

*Transformer Alert: Killing two birds with one stone and two stone (each with three stones) on a wall; and a man's body will drop down from the sky. So the next time you see three stones on a wall with five stones (each with five stones) on a wall with three stones (each with five stones) on a wall, you can try doing the same.*

*Sweet Vengeance.*

For Jerry's naming ceremony, even though the Hotters hadn't invited anyone but one from Fishmarts, the Lizards still knew of a new addition to the family. When the news reached Fortesnort, he and his followers, reached the child's naming ceremony, uninvited, of course, to be served with steaming hot, tasty party food. However, this stupid habit of them wasn't very welcomed by the Hotters—who called the police upon their arrival. Never having heard a siren before, the Eaters had fled back to Fishmarts. Fortesnort, on the other hand, determined to eat (his life ambition!!), stayed there, coming out of his hiding only when the police were gone. Bubbling with the anger of:

1. Not being served food. And,
2. Being brought dishonour to,

Fortesnort threw whatever he could get hold of—at the baby—which turned out to be a spoon. The spoon had landed on its back on baby's forehead—hurting him instantly. The mother, upon hearing her baby's cries, came to the scene out of nowhere—no longer being able to tolerate this "Eater" nonsense.

She beat Fortesnort with an even bigger spoon, to avenge the harm he had brought upon her only offspring. Beaten to a pulp, Fortesnort would have died there, had it not been for Roarers, who escorted him back to his cell in Fishmarts.

The baby had turned out to be okay later on. But the scar remained: An Oval.

—

His plan was simple.

- Send a message to 'the One-Eyed Prince' and 'the 33-Teethed Prince' informing them that he, under the alias 'the Half-Blood Prince' (out of hundreds of half-blooded idiots, no one would ever suspect him), had captured the Eater's son—Taco.
- Taco was to not come out of his room till the next morning, no matter what happened.
- Send mails to Dugonahull and Rickaroll, by the alias 'the Cold-Blooded Prince', asking them to (i) remain inside the Great Mall after the dark, and (ii) not tell anyone of the message.
- Ask Greg and the rest of the team members to pursue students to roam throughout the school at night because a surprise egg hunt was being organised. The quantity of the students didn't matter—but the more, the better. Evidence.



Knowing that a typewriter was being used for communication, he had successfully ruled out the students.

“Taco,” Jerry re-told. “Remember—”

“That I am supposed to lock myself inside my room—” Taco said matter-of-factly. “This is the tenth time you’ve told me. I assure you everything will be alright.”

Jerry breathed hard. “I hope so. Wrong?”

“I am to post the letters—Making sure that the recipient names are all correct. We all are supposed to be—not sleeping at night.”

“Correct— M1 and M2—” Jerry looked around. Not finding them around, he continued, “Whoops! My bad, they are already at the work.”

“And, Germione and I are to make sure that no one is doing anything suspicious,” remembered Greg. “And YOU are to make sure that you don’t look suspicious. Go, find an alibi. Rickaroll—”

“Right then, Kevil, there we go,” Jerry cheered and the two clapped.

## Labyrinth

**T**he sun went down as soon as it had come and then came dinner time. All this time was spent with—Jerry hoping for the best—if the idiot cat failed to deliver those letters, all hope was lost. However, he was sure that once an alarm had been raised, Fishmartians wouldn't be able to not comply.

He also knew that if he went to the meeting place himself—the place where he had asked the One-Eyed Prince and the 33-Teethed Prince to come as to rescue Taco safely—and raised an alarm sensing something suspicious, Rickaroll wouldn't believe him. Therefore, instead of going there himself, he asked Greg—following all the safety precautions—to mark his presence at the spot.

After the dinner was over, the students were busy silently creeping the corridors, not wanting anyone else to win the first (Oh dear! Wish they knew the truth!), when they heard the shrillest voice they had ever heard coming from somewhere about the Music Room on the ground floor. However, having their rooms on the third and the fourth floors didn't stop them from reaching the spot before any of the staff could arrive.

The music room lied far opposite the Great Mall, with former being the second largest room on the campus. Between the two were all—overall 5 in number—the teachers' offices-cum-rooms, starting from the right of the two exits of the Great Mall—the Headmaster's and

Vice-Headmistress's offices opposite to them, on the left end.

Hearing the scream, Jerry, currently in his room (still without a door), trembled with fear and rushed in the direction of the voice.

*What have I done? They have got Greg.*

When he reached there, however, he found out that the mob had been quicker than him. Callbus and Deserva stood fixed, having come out of the Great Mall, confused, upon seeing Cooty and Grudge getting beaten up by the students. Even the non-staff members, Hafbrid and Silch had come after hearing those screams, not to mention, Jerry's now favourite, Mrs. Boris. Greg's scream had been energetic enough to wake up even the ones who slept about one-tenth kilometres and beyond, just outside the school campus.

"They had killed me," Greg accused, still shaking with fear as to what might have had happened had it not been for these students to have come to his aid.

"What might have caused such a behaviour from Mr. Cooty?" Rickaroll questioned, already uneasy with the contents of the letters he had received. "And what might Minister Grudge be doing at such an odd hour of the day?" It was nine-and-a-half minutes to midnight already.

"Ask Greg what he had been doing?" Cooty replied back.

Greg lied about how he had been looking for clues for the secret Easter Egg hunt that was being organised at the school. Not remembering any such organisation, Rickaroll asked the Vice-Headmistress regarding the same, who happened to be—at the time—worried of the letter she had received. But before she could reply, the other students confirmed Greg's saying of a secret Hunt he was participating in. They All Were! And no one remembering the original source of information—even provided Greg with the benefit of the doubt.

What a relief it was for him!

## Surprise!!!

**H**aving heard from Greg, came the time to hear Cooty's part of the story. Cooty had just started to explain why he and Grudge had struck Greg—thinking of him as an Eater who was about bring bad to the school—when Silch's cat attacked Cooty from behind, grabbing the letter he had been hiding in his back-pocket—in her mouth.

To everyone's surprise, Mrs. Boris wandered around the mob, the letter still clenched between her jaws, and dropped the letter before anyone but Jerry. He picked it up.

"The One-Eyed Prince," Jerry read out aloud, horrified before looking at Cooty. It had been the same letter that Jerry had addressed to the One-Eyed Prince. The cat, attacking Grudge this time, brought out his note as well, before Jerry.

"The 33-Teethed Prince is the Minister himself," Jerry said, shocked, as he read the letter's recipient's name. "Why would it hand it to me, though?" He said, remembering that he hadn't been the one to post these. Wrong had been assigned to do the same. Why him then? No one understood.

Lucky Jerry! No one was yet interested in looking at the contents inside.

"I think she likes you," Silch said, sounding like a creep to Jerry. This was the first time Jerry was looking at their hostel warden. He was fat

but skinny at the same time; not as fat as Hafbrid though—bald—fatness maximum at the top, decreasing linearly on going down.

“Letters, huh?” Rickaroll said, producing three from his pocket and collecting the fourth from his wife.

Flipping open the first, he read, “To the One-Eyed Prince: We were successful. Let’s see what the second one reads—” He looked at Cooty suspiciously, feeling betrayed. Keeping the first letter safely, he summarised the second, “To the 33-Teethed Prince, A better cat has to be brought. Plans have to be changed. What is going on here?” he demanded an answer.

“Speaking of letters,” Grape primed, handing Callbus some 4-5 letters while simultaneously making sense of whatever was going on. “I happen to have received quite a few this evening. No sender specified. Most of which, were not even meant for me.”

Looking at those letters, Jerry still didn’t understand why the most emergent of the mails had reached correctly while the others—not as much emergent—hadn’t. Neither of the TSTPF members looked at each other. To avoid suspicion.

Taco was still in his room, been locked from outside by M1 and M2.

## Resolution

**R**ickaroll grew furious on hearing Cooty's account—Cooty being repeatedly scratched by Mrs. Boris until he revealed the true story. The whole school, Shrek! the whole Fishmarts wanted to know the truth that had been kept hidden from them, all these years.

This night was going to be a long one.

Long story short, Cooty's private security agency (PSA, in short), Roarers had been successful in fooling Callbus Rickaroll into thinking that they were actually saving the school from Fortesnort's attacks while in reality, they had been the ones to cause havoc and destruction and all, which was then blamed on Fortesnort and the Eaters. Not only that, he admitted having received help from Grudge, the Minister himself—an inside man is always needed for a successful reconnaissance. If Fishmarts School of Fishcraft and Fishery hadn't been in danger, his agency would never have obtained the contract and thereby the money. An Entrepreneur indeed!

Further interrogation revealed a sibling rivalry as the cause of the situation. A fact that no one knew previously (but now all did), was that Dord and Cooty had been brothers. Cooty, busy rivalling his elder brother's success, had ended up in a position from which there was no turning back.

Parents, you have been warned!

Now, the only one to not know that Cooty had been Fortesnort's brother, was Dord himself. It was better that way.

—

Even after the suspense was over—the students were still there—over the time having forgotten that there was supposed to be some kind of hunt that they were to participate in. Using their discussions as a disguise, Germione and Wrong came to Jerry, finally having found him.

"That was brilliant, Jerry!" cheered Wrong. "How did you know that it was Cooty?"

"I—" Jerry said.

"I believed him," Germione complained. "All my life at Fishmarts has been a lie! I never thought that Cooty could have been so bad."

"I had no idea that it was him," Jerry replied. "To answer Wrong's question. I thought we were going to catch some Eaters tonight. And Jerry wasn't brilliant, the Team was. Speaking of which, why do I feel that—"

"Taco!" answered Wrong. "He's still in that room."

"Shrek! You are right," exclaimed Jerry. "Poor him. I am going to knock him out."

"That isn't what he means," Germione explained to Wrong. "It's 3:15 in the morning now. Let's wake him up—"

"Jerry?" Wrong called for him but he was nowhere to be found. He had left.

"He is always like that," Wrong whispered to himself.

## The Crown-Jewelled Prince

“...and had it not been for some,” Callbus was now reading for the forty-first time, the letters that had pestered him and the Vice-Headmistress previously, “some the Cold-Blooded Prince, we would never have known this. Thanks to the Cold-Blooded Prince who saved us all in the knack of time...”

The crowd, upon hearing the name, cheered for their dear saviour. Rickaroll was glad, too, that the Cold-Blooded Prince had saved him from getting looted any further. His teeth weren’t hiding now. On the mention of the name, however, one person grew impatient and worried.

“The Cold-Blooded Prince,” the man repeated several times before reaching a conclusion. “Jerry!”

Speaking Jerry’s name drew unnecessary public attention on him. Beverous Grape was being the centre of attention this time—a thing, being an introvert, he deeply hated.

“What?” he yelled, annoyed. “All I am saying is that the Cold-Blooded Prince deserves a round of applaud, like the one we had for Mr. Jerry Hotter that day.”

“Rightly said, Beverous,” Rickaroll replied, applauding, “Let’s have a round of applaud for THE COLD-BLOODED PRINCE.”

“THE COLD-BLOODED PRINCE!” the commotion hailed and began applauding as instructed, while Mr. Grape felt relieved on seeing Jerry, with Taco Machloy on his side.



*Was that your plan, Junior? Well played!* Grape smiled. Seeing him smile, Jerry smiled back.

Beverous Grape—known to his students as Mr. Grape was the Lotions and Commotions teacher and the Head of Glycerine house at Fishmarts. Officially an LnC teacher, appointed by Rickaroll himself, he secretly taught Chemistry to those who were interested, for free, because he believed in free access to quality education for everyone. Unknown to any Fishmartian, he even had a YouTube channel for the same.

He had been the one to explain to Lilium—the meaning of an invitation (not the messenger, mind you!) to Fishmarts. Being in the same year as him, Jerry's parents had been the ones to show him, the wonders of Science—and the Technology it gave rise to. The day he truly realised the meaning of those words, Beverous had vowed to devote his life to Science, especially to Chemistry. The three secretly became friends as well, unknown to the world.

Remember, the only person in Fishmarts to have received an invitation to Jerry's naming ceremony? It had been Grape. However, not wanting to arouse suspicion, he texted his friends, warm wishes for the child, and apologies for not being able to come at the moment, using a secret mobile-service that he still has access to.

HE was the one with whom Jerry's parents were arguing—when Jerry had eavesdropped on their conversation.

## The End?

**T**he onset of dawn marked a new beginning for Jerry. The secret as to who The Cold-Blooded Prince was... uhm... WERE was out now. Rickaroll and the other Fishmartians weren't ready to believe that it was Jerry's plan that nabbed the culprits and all, but Grape handled the situation well. He was also the one to pursue the Headmaster "to let go of Jerry" stating that "he had done what no else could."

—

"Leaving too soon, Mr. Grape?" Jerry asked, upset that the only teacher he knew would be leaving the school, as both walked out of the building—oblivious to the surprise that awaited him near the biggest tree of the garden—the tree that Jerry had deduced out was an apple one, his first day here.

"We all leave someday. Don't we?" Grape questioned back. Questioning back was his favourite pastime.

"...Especially when the people we love, give us a call."

Jerry stood frozen—even in the deadly heat of August—not able to answer—as he noticed familiar figures lurching out from the other side of the tree— a man and a woman in their early thirties. The woman, a professor of Chemistry at the University of Purrconston, shared looks, hair colour, the planet, and some other obvious things with Aunt Kinsi—being sisters.

Thames Hotter, a Marine Engineer by profession—whom Jerry resonated with, in behaviour, personality, and thought-process, stood there—his arms wide open—for his kid to come running at him.

—

Totally in a different world for some time, Jerry finally came rushing towards the two.

“Son,” began Thames and Jerry immediately grew pale. Otherwise “Jerry”, he became their ‘son’ only whenever some bad news had to be announced. Like, the last time it was used to announce, “Son, your Grandma—whom you have no idea that even existed— passed away last night of old age. Therefore, we will have you dropped at your Aunt’s as you are too young to come with us. Have fun with Cuddly!” At other times, it (mainly) used to be, “Son, your ever-growing violent behaviour has been brought to our notice...”

The time when it had hurt the most was, “Quick son! We are leaving for the Andrews.” He was—upon reaching there—informed that his mother, Lilium, had been in a car accident. All to say that—good news never accompanied the word ‘son’. Jerry wondered what bad had happened this time.

“...You have made us proud.”

Jerry’s muscles relaxed. He exhaled deeply—having held his breath for too long without ever realising it. Several situations or a combination of those had wandered off in the back of his head, and therefore—the news turned out to be a great relief.

“Ask for anything!” Thames offered, which was implicitly followed by “mind the budget.”

*Transformer Alert: All the fishes in the water and in somebody’s food clapped for Jerry, wiping off their tears. A guy in his 40s, wearing a suit and shoes with his head up, asked them, “Do you ever have to make a \$10 donation?” and Mr. King Fish replied a big NO. And it was a whole other story.*

"Promise me. That you'll never send me to Fishmarts again. Ever," Jerry had suddenly lost all control over his emotions. One month of parent-lessness—one FULL month without the books he loved—ONE MONTH of always being yelled at for no reason in particular.

The torture was over now.

The protagonist was facing an emotional outburst at the moment.

Letting him sob a little, Liliu began affectionately, "We can't promise you that, Jerry..." Jerry looked at his mother's dark brown eyes—which were the same colour as his (he didn't have his mother's eyes! He had his own set of eyes that somehow resembled his mother's. God forbid if Jerry were (had) to somehow get his mother's eyes—Liliu would have gone eye-less!), which shone brightly when looking at her son—for an answer as to what she meant.

"...For, you see, every place is Fishmarts in some sense or the other."

Jerry looked at his mother who was smiling at him—nodding, before he turned to his father, Thames, who repeated the same.

The tears in his eyes had dried up and he stood—in front of them—smiling back. He understood why his parents had never mentioned the place before him— why they had never told him about Fishmarts. This month had INDEED been a long one, but it was NOW that he had truly learnt the practical and the rational way to approach an existing problem, while simultaneously being successful in teaching others to do the same.

It was a HAPPY ENDING, after all—for the protagonist.

No one really cares about the antagonists, I guess. Or the side characters.

## VII

### 2000 Years Later

*It has been 2000 years since the incident, and even in the afterlife, Jerry has absolutely no idea, where in the world Fishmarts is. Nor is he interested.*

*Transformer Alert: The fox named Phoenix and Silch's cat, Mrs. Boris, are now the owners of a park, which is a popular attraction, according to their owners, Phoenix and Mrs. Boris. Phoenix and Mrs. Boris are the owners of some of the most famous Chain Stores in the Universe. Nobody owns them. And they own nobody.*



## About the Author

Author is a human made of flesh and bones, who happens to co-exist in this Universe along with other living/non-living beings. Author hates to write this biography in third person but has to, because TRADITION!?

When not engaged with anything creative, the author sleeps! Author aspires to become a good person upon growing up.

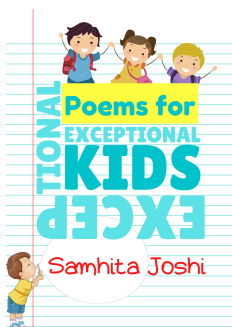
Also, the author copy-pastes this same biography onto every book she writes.

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## Also by Samhita Joshi



### Exceptional Poems for Exceptional Kids

<https://leanpub.com/epfek>

Exceptional Poems for Exceptional Kids, in short to be referred as EPFEK, is the first book that the author has written (and published) that other people can read (the debut book). It is a collection of 10 original Sciency Poems for people of all ages, especially Teens and Pre-Teens, to spark interest

in Science.



### STOP THE SHADOW DAMS

<https://gumroad.com/l/stsdams>

A Sherlock Holmes screenplay by two Neural Networks: one Artificial and the other Natural, meant to be fictional.

1. SHERLOCK and JOHN are seen searching the trash for corn. Angry noises can be heard. A car driver is seen with a card and his car.
2. Camera pans to Laundry Magnussen wandering if I am complete with the paper.
3. A hand drops at the end of the shadows through the wall on the floor. SHERLOCK stares at the desk thinking it to be a door and drops his shoe on his back.





### **The Netbil issallers**

<https://gumroad.com/l/netbil>

A sequel to STOP THE SHADOW DAMS.

1. The door slams the stairs and stands over the building surrounded by the houses.

2. “Four people don’t think we’re happily agitating.” —Sherlock

3. “SHERLOCK HOLMES. The book which cases the side of the street is very important to me.” —John

